

NURSE

Author of ‘

NURSE REVEL'S MISTAKE.

A NOVEL.

BY

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of Darkness," etc., etc.*

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NURSE REVEL'S MISTAKE

CHAPTER I.

A SUMMONS.

IN a third-class compartment of the Liverpool express, a young woman, in the long cloak and flowing veil of a nurse, was reading a telegram with a puzzled expression.

It was addressed to "Matron, Nurses' Home, Francis Street, Francis Square, London," and the message was as follows :

"Please send experienced nurse at once Edinburgh and South Western Hotel, Dime Street, Liverpool. Case of brain fever."

There was no name given, and the nurse sat considering this omission.

"It will be odd to ask for 'The Person who has got brain fever,' without knowing whether it's man, woman, or child," she thought to herself. "However, I suppose it will be pretty easy to find him—or her, as it's not likely there will be people with brain fever on every floor. It's almost sure to be a man too, so I

shall ask for 'the gentleman who has telegraphed for a nurse.' "

Reluctantly deciding that there was no more information to be gleaned from the message, she put the telegram into her bag, wrapped herself more closely in her rug—for the month was October, and it was already very cold—and glanced round at her fellow passengers, to see whether any of them were interesting looking enough to be worthy the trouble of a little conjecture as to their minds or their lives. But they were a sufficiently commonplace set, interesting chiefly as illustrative of the variety of types brought together by increasing the comfort of third-class carriages. There was a curate who, either from shyness or ill-breeding, helped himself to the newspapers of his companions without permission, and put them down again without acknowledgment. There was an old half-blind farmer with a strong Lancashire dialect who had, he was eager to inform his fellow passengers, "been to Lunnon ter see an eye-doctor!" And there was a well-dressed, youngish lady with a silver-mounted traveling bag and no end of handsome rugs, smelling bottles and cushions, who was aggressively, vixenishly poor, and who kept asking everybody whether it was true that the fare to Liverpool was to be reduced from sixteen shillings and sixpence to sixteen and fourpence-halfpenny, and whether there was

service of omnibuses between Dime Street and Central Stations. To all which questions the remaining passenger, a young Scotch mechanic, with a hard face and dignified manners, returned, for the whole company, short and rather dry answers.

Rose Revel, the nurse, foresaw no pleasure in conjectures concerning any of these people, and was forced to entertain herself, neither pleasurably nor profitably, with thoughts about herself and her own prospects. For she alone, of all the people in the compartment, was spoken to by none. This, however, was an experience to which she was accustomed, although she herself scarcely understood the reason of it.

The reason lay in her face. Above the middle height and thin, Rose Revel's figure was not without both grace and dignity. A man walking behind her in the street would generally be sufficiently impressed by those rare attractions in an English woman—a splendid walk and carriage, to glance, in passing, at her face. And that glance dispelled the attraction. Not that she was plain; on the contrary, however repellant to you the face might be, you were obliged to admit that it might be handsome, but it was not the style of beauty you admired. Great, blazing black eyes with straight thick lashes, surmounted by a pair of horizontal, bushy eyebrows which almost met, gave

to the dark-skinned face an expression of bold and defiant wickedness. A low, broad forehead, round which the fine black hair, cut short and brushed back, formed a soft fringe of escaped tendrils, enhanced this effect; so that not even the garb she wore, eloquent of healing, and patience, and mercy, could counteract the impression made by her face, which had at one time threatened to be an insuperable difficulty in the profession she had chosen.

Nor until she had exclusively proved herself the most skilful, the quickest, the neatest, the softest-footed, and the most untiring of all the nurses she associated with in home or hospital, did Rose Revel conquer the prejudice raised against her by her handsome but almost sinister face. One of the two daughters of a clever physician, who had died too young to reap the benefit of his skill and experience, Rose, finding herself without enough money to live and support her young sister without working, had taken to nursing by a natural instinct, which would have led her, but for the opposition of her friends, to study medicine and set up as a doctor.

Natural aptitude and a highly cultivated intelligence had done so much for her, that now, at five and twenty, she was accounted the best of the nurses at the Home where she had taken up her residence, in preference to living with relations who were not sympathetic to her.

Rose Revel was not a happy woman, although she enjoyed excellent health, followed the profession of her choice, and was engaged to be married to a man whom she believed she had reason to respect. Respect, that was all. Rose felt little of the glow of a warmer feeling for the young doctor who had worried her into promising to marry him. All the warmth of her heart was bestowed on her sister, a beautiful girl some years younger than herself, who was now causing her a grief so deep that Rose, in justice to her work, dared not let her thoughts rest upon it.

After reading through for the sixth time a letter from her *fiancé*, with vexation rather than with tenderness, Rose leaned back in the corner of the carriage, and passed the rest of the journey in dreary reflections, which she in vain tried to check by studying the "*Daily News*" with quite desperate determination. She read, with a valiant attempt to be interested, that a new piece had been produced at a certain popular theatre, that the lady who played the heroine had been as sweet and charming as usual, the hero as earnest and manly; that villainy had been foiled in a number of excellently painted scenes with very much the same situations and exactly the same language as in the preceding plays at the same theatre. Then two columns further on, she read that there was trouble in Sergania, a so-called independent kingdom

between Russia and Turkey, where the Czar had some years before concurred in the establishment of a foreign prince as king. This sovereign, however, having proved an able ruler instead of a puppet, had excited Russian jealousy, and it was rumored that he was about to place his only son under the protection of a foreign minister. With a final vain attempt to find distraction in the admonitions, "Buy direct from the farmers," and "Save half your coals," by using somebody's patent stoves, she gave up the paper in despair, and remained for the rest of the journey with eyes closed as if in sleep,

When the train reached Liverpool and ran slowly into Dime Street Station, Rose Revel looked out to see whether any one was on the platform waiting for her. It was six o'clock, and already dark. No one seemed to notice her. Calling a porter, she had her trunk taken into the hotel, and followed with the brisk, business-like gait affected by the women of her profession. She did not feel brisk, however; she was tired out, not so much with physical fatigue as with the various troubles and anxieties which had of late disturbed her mind.

Perhaps it was on this account that, just as she passed through the doorway into the hotel, she was seized by a fit of nervous depression so violent, so unusual, that she stopped short, wondering whether

she was going to be ill. Regaining her self-possession as the porter looked at her inquiringly, she walked on with an effort, and inquired at the office for the gentleman who had telegraphed for a nurse. The manageress, an intelligent, lady-like woman, smiled with a look of relief, which was instantly followed by an expression of anxiety as she examined the face of her interlocutor.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Rusk. He is on the third floor. You must go up in the lift; I will send some one with you."

But independence being the badge of all her tribe, Nurse Revel answered at once:

"Oh, no, thank you; I can find him myself if you will only give me the number of his room. And I'd rather not go up in the lift, thank you."

"Very well: it is number 107. Shall I send you up some tea?"

"Yes, if you please. I should like a cup of tea very much."

"You will find the poor gentleman very difficult to manage, I'm afraid. They say he raves most dreadfully. Very unlucky for him to be taken ill away from home like this, was it not?" continued the manageress, who had come out of the office in order to accompany the nurse as far as the staircase.

Rose quite understood why this good lady kept

her talking when her services were urgently needed. The manageress, like most people with whom she came in contact, was struck with her face, and in the interests of the invalid felt bound to study the owner of such a forbidding countenance.

"Well," she answered, rather sourly, for this constant suspicion of her, for no better reason, as it seemed to her, than because she had thick eyebrows, was irritating and absurd, "he wouldn't have been any better nursed at home than he will be under my care ; I can undertake to say that."

And she began the ascent of the stairs with quick firm steps.

"Certainly not, of course not," murmured the manageress, politely.

But she watched the movements of the lithe, black-robed figure with undiminished curiosity and anxiety.

Rose went up the first flight of steps with her usual quick steps, but with her mind in a drowsy, weary, bewildered state, very different from the alert expectancy and interest with which she generally entered upon her duties in each fresh case. She seemed, try as she would, to be unable to concentrate her mind upon the work she was about to begin ; her thoughts* were still struggling with her personal troubles, in spite of all her conscientious efforts to

divert them. At the head of the stairs, just as she reached the first floor, however, she was suddenly brought back to herself by an incident so slight as to seem scarcely worth noticing. She heard a soft footfall on the thickly carpeted stairs above, and suddenly remembering that the sight of a sick-nurse might cause alarm to the other visitors at the hotel, she stepped into an alcove filled with plants on the landing, and sat down on the seat it contained, to wait until the way should be clear. A long corridor, broken by the landing, stretched to right and left.

Almost as soon as Rose had seated herself the person whose footsteps she had heard came into her view, descending the stairs in a leisurely manner. He was a tall, thin, gentlemanly man, with greyish hair, pointed greyish beard, rather aquiline features and intelligent eyes. He had scarcely reached the landing when another gentleman came out from a room in the corridor on the left of Rose. He was a young man, even taller than the first, with a pale, fat, fair face, long light hair, and a long light moustache, with bushy, outstanding ends, a smug, self-satisfied expression, and a way of carrying his head very far back, and his eyes apparently fixed on some distant and elevated object. Rose thought to herself that he looked like a great ginger-colored cat, moving as he did with soft, sliding steps, and breathing rather

heavily as if, she thought, about to begin to purr. He wore a very voluminous caped cloak, and a low-crowned, soft felt hat. Passing the elderly man with quick, inaudible steps, he turned, when he was a little way below him on the stairs, and looked inquiringly into his face with an expression of anxiety and fear peeping through his habitual fatuity. The other, who had stopped short on first catching sight of him, shook his head, and Rose guessed from the discomfited expression on the younger man's face that the elder had accompanied this sign of dissent or disapproval by a frown or a glance of grave displeasure. The younger man turned immediately and glided downstairs with quicker steps than before; the elder, on the contrary, slackened his to the very slowest possible pace as he followed. When he too had disappeared Rose Revel came out of the alcove, went on her way upstairs, and arrived without further incident on the second floor.

She was still thinking of the encounter of the two men, each of whom had certain points in his appearance to make him easy to recognize and remember. So that at the top of the second flight of stairs she paused, not quite certain how far she had come; and then she found, to her annoyance, that she had forgotten the number of the sick man's room. She was not going down to the office to ask for it again, that was very certain; she would find it out.

She had hardly gone half a dozen steps down the corridor to the left, in the hope that the numbers on the doors would help her to recall the one she had forgotten, when the second door on the right was thrown quickly open, and the face of a frightened chambermaid peeped out. At sight of the nurse the girl exclaimed "Oh!" below her breath, as if greatly relieved, and, coming a little further out, beckoned to her hastily. Rose Revel came to the door, and, glancing in, saw in the toilet mirror, which was nearly opposite, the reflection of a bed with a man lying in it. Of course she concluded that this was the patient for whom she had been sent.

"Mr. Rusk?" she asked.

For answer, the chambermaid pulled her into the room.

"There, there," she whispered, hurriedly, pointing towards the bed, which was partially hidden by a screen placed between it and the door, "I wouldn't stay another ten minutes in a room with him, not if you was to give me a pound a minute!"

"Has he been raving, then?" asked the nurse, surprised.

For she heard no sound from the patient as, with one ear given to him and one to the maid, she quickly took off her bonnet, cloak and gloves, and laid them on the nearest chair.

"Oh, I don't know what he's been doing, but he frightens me. As soon as the gentleman went out of the room, he went and started up with his eyes glaring, and showed his teeth, and went on ever so. Then he hurt himself, I think, for he just laid back and groaned, and shut his eyes, till I felt that nervous as I could have jumped out of the window."

"What gentleman was that?"

"The one that he came here with yesterday. He didn't seem right-like then, didn't this one, for he was all of a shake, and looked as glum as glum. And then this morning, just as he was going away, he fell downstairs, and that's how it happened. And the other gentleman wouldn't let him go to a hospital, but just sent off for a nurse. And now I can go, can't I? The gentleman said I could as soon as the nurse come."

"Oh, yes, certainly. Do you know when the doctor is coming again?"

"No, I don't. He hasn't been gone above three hours, I don't think."

"All right; you can go now."

The girl did not wait a moment, but was gone so quickly, that Rose Revel had not time to remind her that she should be glad of the promised cup of tea. Then Rose went at once to the bedside of the patient.

The sick man had one of the most striking faces

she had ever seen. He was apparently between sixty and sixty-five years of age, had a long, flowing grey beard and strongly marked features; on the forehead and around the mouth and eyes the tell-tale lines spoke of keen intellect, gentle disposition, noble endeavor. This the nurse could read in spite of the fact that the whole face was contracted by an expression of agony, so deep, so terrible that in all her experience of suffering she had never met with a case which at once called out her sympathy so strangely. It struck her at once, however, that the pain so vividly shown on her patient's face was mental rather than physical, and then again it seemed to her that he looked strangely calm and quiet for a person suffering from brain fever. His eyes were closed, and he lay so absolutely motionless that he looked like a statue of suffering; the thin, delicate left hand clutching the bed clothes in a grip like a vice, while a magnificent signet ring he wore shone red, like blood, against the deadly whiteness of his skin.

Rose Revel laid her hand lightly upon his forehead. It was perfectly cool.

In her surprise she hardly noticed that he shuddered at her touch. But he did not open his eyes. She stepped back, debating whether she should ring the bell, and make inquiries. There was a mistake somewhere; whatever this gentleman might be suffer-

ing from, at any rate it was not brain fever. Her eyes traveled down from his face until they rested on the spot at the other end of the bed where his feet lay.

"You have hurt your right foot, have you not?" she asked, noticing with quick professional glance that it was bandaged and otherwise supported.

The old man opened his eyes, and an expression of contempt and disgust came into his face as he looked at her. After examining her countenance for a few moments he answered in a firm voice, very slowly, with a slight foreign accent:

"You will obtain your information—and your instructions—from your employer, when he comes in."

"My employer!" echoed Rose. "Are not you my employer?"

"Oh no!" he continued in a tone of grave, cold sarcasm; "I am only your victim."

"Not quite so bad as that," said the nurse in a coaxing tone.

Some great grief, from which he was evidently suffering, had unhinged his mind, she thought. She had a very deep-toned voice which she could render particularly persuasive and sweet, and she used it now with all the art she was mistress of.

"I don't know where you can have picked up such a bad opinion of us poor nurses, but I must try hard, for the sake of my order, to make you alter it."

He listened without looking at her, and seemed impressed by her voice. When, after a short pause, he spoke again, it was in the same dry, bitter tone as before.

"I shall give you very little trouble, madam, I have no wish to live."

"But that's just where the trouble is," said Rose, smoothing the sheets with soft, deft hands; "or rather, that's just where it would be if you were dangerously ill. As it is—"

"As it is, I *am* dangerously ill. Again I say—Ask your employer."

"Well, this employer of mine, whoever he may be, can only say that you have—a sprained ankle, is it?"

"That is what they call it, I believe."

"And that if you so persistently take this gloomy view of things, it will be weeks before you get well."

"I shall never get well," said he in a solemn tone.

"Oh, yes, you will. No man ever died of a sprained ankle."

"But have you never heard of one dying of a broken heart?"

"A woman perhaps, a weak, hysterical woman. Not a brave, good man."

"How do you know that I am brave and good?"

"You know what I am, a sick-nurse; for many

hours each day and night, when I am on duty, I have nothing to do but to watch, watch, and study every look, every movement of my patient. I find that in these times of sickness it is much easier to read a man's character by his face than when he is enjoying his usual health. He is no longer moved by the small cares and worries, and duties and pleasures of every-day life, so that the broad lines in which his character lies are easy to trace in the furrows of his face. I even choose to fancy that, in the case of a man over fifty, I can read not only his character, but the principal facts of his biography."

To her great satisfaction she perceived that he was so much interested in her words as to have lost already part of the appalling gloom which had shocked her.

"Do you mean to tell me, then, that you can read my history in my face?" Then with a rapid change of expression to contempt. "Of course. I forgot. You were told all about me before you came."

"I will tell you what I heard, and you shall judge how much it has helped me. This is the telegram I received."

She crossed the room to the chair on which she had placed her things, opened her bag, took out the telegram, and gave it to her patient. He read it through two or three times with some bewilderment, "Brain fever," he muttered to himself.

"You come from a Nurses' Home, then?" he asked, raising his eyes to examine her face narrowly.

"Yes. It is a very well-known one indeed."

"And you don't know who sent this telegram?"

"No."

"Did nobody meet you on the platform downstairs?"

He was growing excited as he put these questions and received her simple and straightforward answer.

"No one. Of course I expected to be met, but there was no one there."

"Who sent you up here then?"

"The manageress. At least I suppose it was the manageress. She was in the office on the ground floor."

There was a pause. He was evidently convulsed with doubts, which were weakened every now and then by a transient hope, but returned with full force as the hope died away. At last he asked slowly, in a manner which suggested to Rose that he was struggling to hide the deep interest he felt in her answers, and in her manner of delivering them:—

"Do you find in me the symptoms of brain fever?"

"No."

"How do you account for that?"

"I don't account for it: I wait for things to explain themselves."

"In the meantime, you study my face?"

"Certainly," answered Rose, smiling. "I can't help it. The study of my patients is no longer deliberate with me, it is instinctive."

"And what have you discovered?"

"I haven't had time yet to discover much, have I?"

He raised his hand with a peremptory gesture.

"You seem so far to have been straightforward. Continue so."

Rose smiled again.

"I have discovered that you are accustomed to be obeyed."

"Well?"

"If I had not been told your name I should have said you were a man of rank."

He looked at her more intently than ever.

"You were told my name then?"

"Yes."

Again he paused and examined her face for nearly a minute in the same eagerly scrutinizing fashion as before.

Before either spoke again there was a soft knock at the door. In an instant the face of the sick man underwent a great change. All the eagerness, all the light went out of it, and the black cloud which had seemed to enshroud him on her first entrance began to settle down again rapidly upon his face.

Rose went to the door. The manageress was standing there with a troubled face.

"Oh," she said. "You have put me in such a difficulty! You have come to the wrong room. You were sent for for Mr. Rusk, and as you didn't arrive they've had to send out for one in the town. And now a woman has come who says she was sent for, by Mr. Silchester, for this gentleman. I don't like the look of her *at all*," continued the manageress with emphasis. "But I suppose she must come up now she's here. And about you I really don't know what to do."

She was interrupted by the voice of the patient inside the room, speaking in a dignified and decisive tone.

"Nurse, come here."

With a hasty apology to the manageress, Rose Revel returned to the side of the sick bed. Her patient was much agitated, and he pointed to the wardrobe with a shaking finger, as he handed her a key which he drew from under his pillow.

"Open it," he said, "in the pockets you will find money. Take it, take a great deal; go down, pay this woman to go back and to be silent. Then return quickly to me. I thank God for your mistake."

He sank back with a light in his face, while Rose silently proceeded to obey him.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS PATIENT.

ROSE REVEL's heart beat high with excitement as, in obedience to the command of the sick man, she crossed the room to the wardrobe and unlocked it, candle in hand. Every glance of the patient's eyes, every tone of his voice, interested her, and impressed her with a strong sense that he was a person of some note in the world. He spoke like one used to command, like one whose orders were obeyed without the slightest effort or hesitation.

These impressions were deepened when she opened the wardrobe; for the first thing on which her eyes fell was a traveling cloak lined with soft dark fur which a few moments' scrutiny, as she pretended to hunt for the coat which contained the sick man's purse, proved to be formed of sable-tails. Rose knew something about furs, and she decided that it would be a safe guess to estimate the value of the lining at seven or eight hundred guineas. The next thing she touched was an overcoat, lined throughout with a fine close fur which she did not know.

"No, no," said the sick man impatiently, "it is not either of those. It is a little coat—of velveteen, and it hangs alone."

Rose found it and felt in the pockets. A silk handkerchief fell out, soft and finely woven, with a coronet and J. K. embroidered in the corner. She picked it up and resumed her search.

"Bring it to me," said the sick man.

Rose obeyed and stood waiting beside the bed while he emptied the contents of the pockets before him. A gold chased cigarette-case, a match-box of similar material and design, a few loose papers and cards, a gold pencil-case with a large diamond at the end, three sovereigns, a handful of silver, and a handsome morocco purse and pocket-book mounted in silver gilt, were the principal objects which Rose noticed as the thin hands tumbled them all out in a heap, and held out the pocket-book and purse towards her.

"Here are notes in this," said the sick man in a low, eager voice as he held out the pocket-book; "English notes, plenty. And in that," he pointed to the purse, "there is gold, much gold. Give, give, do not spare. Only send the woman away who was sent for to nurse me, and bid her to say nothing of it."

As his excitement increased the foreign accent

with which he spoke became more and more distinguishable, and for the first time he seemed to choose his words with the alternate hesitation and hurry of a person speaking in a language not his own.

"Oh, sir, you need not give me all this!" said Rose, offering to return the pocket-book. "If I may take the purse——"

"Take both—all. It may be life or death to me," interrupted the sick man. "Send her away, quick, quick, before he comes."

Greatly puzzled, and not without a suspicion that her patient's chief trouble might prove to be with the brain after all, Rose Revel, who had left the manageress of the hotel all this time at the door, slipped both pocket-book and purse into her pocket. Then she removed the coat and its scattered contents on to the sofa, and with a last look at her patient and a reassuring smile went out into the corridor quickly but without hurry.

"I must apologize for keeping you waiting here so long," she said, "but you know one must study an invalid's fancies, and my patient detained me. And I am very sorry that my mistake has caused you all this trouble."

The manageress was good-humored, and accepted her apologies readily.

"Mistakes can't always be avoided, especially when

one is tired after a journey." After a short, pause as they walked downstairs together, she went on: "And how is the difficulty to be got over? Who is going to be nurse?"

"I am. The—the gentleman wishes it. By-the-bye, I don't know his name; can you tell me?"

"No. The gentleman who came with him only gave his own—Mr. Silchester."

"Oh!"

Each wished to ask the other some questions; each hesitated to do so. They went a few steps further in silence. Then their eyes met furtively.

"I—I think, at least I mean I am sure I feel glad that it is you who are going to stay, and not the other one."

"Indeed!" said Rose with interest.

"Yes. She is quite a strange-looking person for a nurse, and—well, you will see and judge for yourself. Yet she showed me the telegram which brought her, and it certainly looked all right. And it was signed 'Frank Silchester.' But she is a very strange-looking person."

"Stranger-looking than I?" asked Rose, glancing at her with a smile.

The manageress looked rather uncomfortable.

"Oh, she is not like you at all," she answered quickly. "I own," she went on, smiling in her turn,

as a further scrutiny of the nurse's face showed her both intelligence and feeling in the great black eyes, "that at first sight of you I was not greatly prepossessed in your favor."

"Nobody is," said Rose. "But then there's a lovely surprise in store for them when they find that my character doesn't match my eyebrows."

"You have a lovely voice," said the manageress, laughing.

"Some people object to that too, as being too deep-toned for a woman." After a short pause, just as they were reaching the ground floor, her curiosity got the better of her, and she suggested rather diffidently: "There is something about this case which seems to me quite mysterious."

The manageress glanced at her quickly: "You mean—do you mean that this gentleman seems to you what one might call a suspicious character?"

"Oh no, oh no, I certainly didn't mean that. But I should like to see the other one, the gentleman who came with him."

"There is nothing mysterious or underhand about him," replied the other, promptly. "Mr. Silchester is quite one of the nicest gentlemen I have ever met, kind and open in his manners, and very polite. The poor gentleman upstairs had just lost his only son, and was almost mad with grief when luckily he met with Mr. Silchester."

"Here?" interrupted Rose.

"No, in London, I believe. Mr. Silchester imagines from what he says that the son is really dead; but the gentleman has an idea that he is alive, and that he has been decoyed away to America, and he proposed to follow and hunt for him."

"Only when he got here he sprained his ankle?"

"Yes, just as he was leaving the hotel to go on board the ship, he slipped and fell as he was coming down the stairs, and sprained his ankle so badly that he fainted, and Mr. Silchester ordered him to be carried upstairs again."

"Doesn't it seem to you a mysterious sort of thing?"

"Mysterious! Oh, so many people who come to hotels do things which might seem mysterious to anyone not used to the business. If we were to inquire into the affairs of every person who comes here and behaves a little out of the common, we might as well call ourselves a detective agency at once. Look," she added in a low voice, as they came near the office, outside which a woman was standing: "That's the woman who says she is sent as nurse."

Rose Revel could scarcely repress an exclamation of amazement.

"There must be some mistake, surely," she murmured only just loudly enough for the manageress to hear. "*That* woman was never sent as a qualified nurse!"

"Well, go and ask her."

And with that the manageress slipped through the little half-door into her office, and left the rival nurses to settle matters between themselves.

Rose approached the other woman with some diffidence. She saw in a moment that, whatever the profession of the new-comer might have been, it had never been sick nursing. Rose took her for a Frenchwoman. She was rather tall, very stout, dressed in shabby black. She wore a thick black veil, but through it Rose Revel's keen eyes could see a coarse bold face, the highly-colored complexion of which awoke the strongest suspicion in her mind. The woman seemed nervous, bowed with an awkward flourish, and stood half-bashfully, half-defiantly, waiting for the other to speak first. Rose Revel's face and figure were of the commanding sort, and her great black eyes had a way of gazing intently at the face of anybody with whom she spoke, as if they would draw out every secret of her interlocutor by magnetic attraction.

"You have come by the request of Mr. Silchester, have you not?" asked Rose, in a subdued voice, "to nurse a gentleman who is ill?"

"Yes, dat is what I come for. Here is de telegram," answered the woman, with a strong Belgian accent, in an aggressive tone.

Rose took the telegram and read it through. It

was addressed to "Mrs. Landeghem, No. 471 Freak Street, Soho." The message was as follows :—

"Send person you can trust implicitly to nurse sick man.

"FRANK SILCHESTER,

"Edinburgh South-Western Hotel,

"Liverpool."

There was nothing in the least suspicious about the wording of this ; but then Freak Street, Soho, seemed an odd place to get a sick-nurse from. However, Rose smiled and gave back the telegram with a nod of entire satisfaction.

"Yes, that's quite right," she said. "Of course they told you all about the case ?"

The woman looked at her out of the corners of her eyes, and after a pause answered cautiously :—

"Mr. Silchester will tell me dat."

"Of course. You know Mr. Silchester, don't you ?"

The woman appeared to resent this examination, and to be uneasy under it. But she answered :

"Not very well. But Madame do."

"Ah, yes, Madame Landeghem ?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Silchester expected you a little earlier, and he has had to engage another person."

"Earlier! Earlier! He expect me earlier! But how? I come as quick as I can," interrupted the woman volubly.

"Well, he seems to think he was a little too impatient, for he has sent me to apologize to you—"

"I want no apologize. I want my work I was to do. I want my money!" cried the Belgian excitedly.

"That you shall have. See!" And Rose Revel produced the purses given her by the sick man.

This action at once had a soothing effect on the other woman.

"Your fare from London and back again—twice sixteen-and-sixpence, that will be thirty-three shillings. And you would have been here a week at five guineas. Here are ten pounds. Are you satisfied?"

"Oh, yes," answered the woman readily, as if greatly relieved by this release from her engagement, "dat is quite right. I tell Madame, and dat will be quite right."

"I am very sorry you should have had the trouble of this journey for nothing," said Rose cordially. "You must let me find out a train to take you back, and give you some refreshments."

Rose was anxious to get the woman out of the hotel, and she immediately led the way into the

station dining-room, summoned a waiter to receive her companion's orders, and proceeded to find out a train to take her back to London. The next train did not start until 11.15, and she felt rather puzzled what to do with her charge until then. But on returning to the table where she had left the pseudo-nurse, she found that the lady had enjoyed the repast she had ordered so fully and freely as to have become exceedingly sleepy; and on learning that she had three hours to wait for her train, she at once expressed her intention of taking a nap in the waiting-room to fill up the time.

"Very well," said Rose. "Then you need not trouble yourself to notice how the time goes by, for I will call you myself, when you ought to be getting ready."

The woman, who seemed to be a stolid and unintelligent person, evidently thought herself lucky to be saved the trouble of taking the initiative in anything. She thanked Rose quite unsuspectingly and even gratefully, settled herself in a corner of a sofa in the waiting-room and went off to sleep before her watchful and attentive companion left the room.

This person disposed of, Rose hastened back to her patient. He was lying quite still, with his eyes closed, and with the old expression of gloom and despair upon his face. He neither moved nor spoke

when she entered, but as she settled herself in an armchair by the fire, she noticed that he half-opened his eyes and looked long and fixedly at her, evidently under the impression that he was unobserved. So she remained for more than half an hour leaning back in her chair, pretending to look at the fire, but keeping a watch on her patient by means of the dressing-table mirror.

At last he called softly : " Nurse ! "

She rose and came at once to the bedside. He looked up into her face with a most pathetic expression of forlorn helplessness, as he spoke to her.

" I am a dying miserable old man, and my wits are not, I think, at their best. Perhaps I have done wrong to trust you so much."

" If you would like to have the nurse who was sent for to you, it is not yet too late ; she is downstairs, waiting for the London train, and I can fetch her in a moment. But I strongly advise you, sir, not to do so, as I am convinced she is not a properly qualified person."

The sick man's face quivered with a grim smile.

" Perhaps she understood the duties required better than you do. However," he went on, in a different tone, " I prefer to keep you now, if you will stay. You look hard, cruelly hard and cold. But you have brains, you seem frank, and so—and so—"

"Of the two evils you would choose the less—a clever, cruel person rather than a simply incompetent one."

"Perhaps your face is not a true index. Indeed I begin to think that it is not. And if you have a grain of heart, you will be moved to let your clever head help me."

Rose put out one of her long, delicate hands, and held it with a warm, firm pressure on one of the invalid's."

"I will help you in any way I can," she answered quietly.

"Then," said he earnestly, in such a low voice that she had to bend her head to catch the words, "when he comes in do not be too kind to me—and—and do not know too much about nursing."

Rose assented, more puzzled than ever by this strange case. One question she felt she must ask, as it might throw light on the patient's mental condition, concerning which she began to have grave doubts.

"Who is he, this man, you think you have so much reason to fear?"

The answer was decidedly unsatisfactory.

"I don't know."

Then it occurred to Rose that her unfortunate patient must be an escaped lunatic whose brain had been turned by misfortune, and the man he dreaded

must be his keeper or guardian. This supposition, however, left the sick man's possession of a large sum of money unaccounted for, and did not explain the engagement as nurse of such a person as the woman she had left downstairs. She could do nothing but pacify her patient by further assurances that she would do everything he wished, and wait eagerly for the appearance of the mysterious Mr. Silchester.

Rose was not kept long in suspense. She had scarcely re-seated herself by the fire, after prevailing upon her patient to take some beef-tea which she had prepared for him, when there was a light knock at the door, and, as she raised her head and prepared to rise, the handle was turned softly and a man's face appeared, peeping into the room.

"I may come in, may I not? Ah, that's right. You're there, nurse, I see. I am Mr. Silchester."

"Yes, sir," said Rose, rising, "I've been here more than two hours."

She was trembling from head to foot, and her knees knocking together. Yet she could not tell why. For all she knew was, that this was the man she had stepped out of the way to avoid on the staircase, and a pleasanter, less formidable middle-aged gentleman, of good appearance and perfect manners, she had certainly never seen. His gloves were so spotless, his clothes fitted so well, his iron-grey hair and beard

were trimmed with such judicious regard to effect, that she was inclined to think him a little too much like an animated fashion plate for a middle-aged English gentleman, until the charm of his pleasant voice and courteous manner insensibly won upon her, so that within a few minutes of his entrance his faultless trimness seemed to be only in harmony with his dignified and courtly movements, and with the delicate precision of his speech. On one point she was at once satisfied. Whether the sick man was in his right mind or not, Mr. Silchester was certainly not the keeper of a lunatic. Rose had relations among the English aristocracy, of whom she had just experience enough to know that Mr. Silchester's manners, suave without being servile, dignified and yet not stiff, were those of a courtier.

He went to the bedside, examined with great solicitude the face of the patient, who was now lying with his eyes closed pretending to be asleep. After raising the sick man's hand softly, feeling his pulse, and bending over him to listen to his breathing, Mr. Silchester came to the fire, gracefully waved his hand to the nurse, who was still standing, with an intimation that she was to be seated, and, drawing a chair to the opposite side of the hearthrug, bent towards her in a confidential manner, and opened conversation in a low-pitched pleasant voice. It was quite a remarkable

voice, Mr. Silchester's, so very soft and caressing in its tones, and withal so clear that every syllable dropped clear as the stroke of a bell upon the ear. Rose Revel was fascinated by this courtly gentleman, who spoke to her with a deferential smile, as if the mere fact of her being a woman was enough to secure his respectful homage. He had full hazel eyes, too, the beauty and brilliancy of which were not properly apparent to his companion until they sat thus close to each other and face to face.

Rose felt that her great black eyes were drawn irresistibly, as if by mesmeric attraction, to the hazel eyes of her companion, that she could not withdraw them, even if she had wished it, and that every movement of his slim white hands gesticulating somewhat freely as he talked, had a charm for her which her struggling efforts proved unable to resist.

"You have my telegram?" he asked, as an opening.

Rose had taken the precaution to get it from the other woman; she now produced it and handed it to Mr. Silchester without a word. He read it through with apparent carelessness, and threw it into the fire as he went on talking.

"Have you been employed as a sick nurse before?"

"Yes," answered Rose, thinking that was enough to admit.

"In cases where a great deal of responsibility was involved?"

"Yes."

"And I have no doubt you have always given complete satisfaction?"

"I hope so," said Rose.

Now these questions were asked simply enough, but there was a searching look in his eyes as he fixed them upon her face which gave the dialogue a sinister significance to Rose's mind.

"You find it a profession which pays very well, I have no doubt, to an accomplished young lady like yourself?"

"Pretty well. It is not over-paid, considering the responsibility it entails."

"Indeed, that is true. And sometimes the best pay is given for the least work."

"Not usually."

"I said 'sometimes,'" returned Mr. Silchester in his caressing voice. "I suppose you were instructed that you would be handsomely remunerated in this case?"

"No. I was simply told to come."

"Ah, well, that was enough to a lady so conscientious as you, of course; at the same time there is no harm in telling you that your services will be rewarded as they deserve."

"Thank you."

Mr. Silchester sat back in his chair, and Rose Revel felt a great sensation of relief as his handsome glittering eyes relaxed their hold of hers. After considering her face for a few moments, with his head thrown a little back, and the same amiable, approving smile playing on his features, Mr. Silchester addressed her again, in the same sweet tones, but just loudly enough now for the sick man to hear if he was awake.

"You will, I think, find your patient a very interesting one, Mrs.— Ah, by-the-bye, I haven't yet had the pleasure of hearing your name?"

"Rose Revel."

"Well, Mrs. Revel, I believe you will be much interested in him. He is evidently suffering from some great misfortune, which has led, I am afraid, to mental disturbance of a serious kind. Has he spoken to you yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wandering in his mind at all?"

"I don't think so. He seemed in great distress and fear, but about what I could not make out."

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! From what I can make out he has just lost a son, and it seemed to have preyed upon his mind."

"You don't know him well then, sir?"

"No, no better than you do yourself. I met him

at St. Pancras Station in a state of such desperate distress that he seemed to be unaccountable for his actions, and as he said he was coming to Liverpool, and I was coming this way too, I took charge of him for the journey. That was yesterday. This morning he proposed to go out to make some inquiries, and I, really believing that distress and excitement had preyed upon his brain, offered to accompany him. Unhappily, as we were going downstairs together his foot slipped and he fell, and we were obliged to help him back to his room and send for a doctor. It appears he has sprained his ankle severely, and will not be able to move for some time."

"Is his son dead?"

"I can't quite understand. Sometimes he speaks of him as dead, and again at others he seems to expect to see him. Perhaps you will be able to find out. By-the-bye, I must apologize for not having met you when your train came in. As a matter of fact I was on my way to do so when I was unexpectedly detained. I hope they have paid you every attention."

"Oh yes, thank you."

"They brought you some tea?"

"I prefer to have it downstairs if I can be spared a few moments, sir."

"Certainly. I will watch till you come back."

Rose Revel got up and went to the bedside. The sick man did not so much as open his eyes. But by the slightest possible movement of the hand he seemed to intimate that she might go. So, without having come near him, she left the room and hurried downstairs, anxious to dismiss the Belgian woman as quickly as possible, and so leave the way clear for her to fulfil the wish of the sick man.

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CHAPTER III.

THE SICK MAN'S STORY.

ROSE REVEL was too much accustomed to look on the practical side of things to be inclined to make a mystery out of nothing. But the more she considered the case in which she was now engaged, the more certain she felt that there was something uncanny about it. She went downstairs very quickly, for it was drawing near the time of the train to London, and she was very anxious to see the Belgian woman safely started on her return journey. On her way down, however, she met with an interruption. A waiter, who was running upstairs with a small tray containing a coffee-pot and two cups, stopped with an exclamation when he reached the step below her.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," he began, addressing her in a somewhat mysterious manner, "but was you the lady what's nursing the gentleman what hurt his ankle yesterday?"

"Yes."

The man's manner grew more confidentially mysterious than ever.

"And is he getting on pretty well, ma'am, do you think?"

"Yes, I think so."

The man gave a deep sigh of relief, intended evidently to awaken curiosity.

"Oh, well, I'm glad to hear it."

Rose Revel, with an impatient movement, stepped aside to pass him, but he detained her again, speaking quickly, in a low voice.

"Please not to be offended, ma'am, but I saw the—h'm—the accident."

"Well?"

"It was one of those accidents that's done on purpose, ma'am."

"Oh, but nobody sprains his ankle on purpose."

"Not his own ankle, ma'am, but he may sprain somebody else's. And as sure as I live, it was the gentleman that was with him as done it, ma'am. He just pulled him a' one side, pretending to look round at something upstairs, and then let go, so as he fell. I saw it with my own eyes, so sure as I stand here."

"It's a very extraordinary story," said Rose imperturbably, and with an assumption of an incredulity she did not feel. "But I don't see what anybody should do such a thing for."

"No, ma'am, no more do I. That's why I thought it so funny."

"And what do your fellow-servants think of your story?"

"Well, they don't believe it, but——"

"And I'm afraid you won't get anyone to believe it. I think you must have been mistaken."

Rose Revel went on her way, pondering this fresh discovery. For the waiter's story chimed in too well with her own suspicions and with the fears of the sick man for her not to believe it. She became, therefore, all the more anxious to retain the post she had unwittingly usurped, and to try to shield the unfortunate gentleman from the mysterious dangers which seemed to surround him.

Rose found the woman who had been sent as nurse fast asleep on the sofa in the waiting-room. She roused her, hurried her into the train for London, and as there were only two minutes to spare before it started, Rose waited on the platform while it steamed slowly out of the station. Then she returned to the sick-room with a lighter heart.

The patient had not moved, as far as she could see, since she left the room. Mr. Silchester was reading a book by the light of a reading-lamp, close to the fire. He looked up with a pleasant smile as she came in, and, resting his open book upon his knee, invited her to take a seat near him. Involuntarily she glanced at the book. Mr. Silchester, who noticed

everything, noticed this, and immediately offered it to her. She read the title—"The Ruling Faith of India."

"It ought to be interesting," said she.

"It ought indeed, having for subject *the* most interesting subject in the world. But it is a skin-deep book, written by a Christian for Christians, full of inevitable prejudices and cant."

"It is a subject you are well acquainted with, then?"

"For five years, utterly fascinated by it, I studied nothing else."

"It is a very popular study over here, too, just now."

"My dear madam, there is no such thing as a popular study. Study, true study, is never popular. Occultism is a fashionable craze in this country at present, and presents the remarkable phenomenon of a religion in which the body counts as a mere encumbrance professed by people in whom nothing counts but the body."

"You are very severe."

"I think not. What proportion of the English classes would you credit with the intelligent possession of a soul? And of what more account than a brute is a man who does not consider his soul so much as his appetite?"

"But how can you judge men like that? The cultivation of the soul is not carried on by chanting lessons aloud in class, like children in a board-school."

"I agree with you, though the congregations in your churches think differently. You will allow that, with the exception of a few ill-authenticated miracles, your cold English religions have no great victories of mind over matter to show?"

"Has yours?"

"Yes. I have seen wonders performed in India by the adepts before which the most wonderful of your Christian miracles grows pale."

"I have heard of them certainly; but, sir, you must forgive me for saying that the finding of the tea-cups under a tree at a picnic, the purposeless drying-up of a well and then permitting its waters to flow again, do not seem to me to belong to a higher category than the healing of the sick and giving sight to the blind."

"Those you have named are mere vulgar manifestations of a power which is the outcome of the victory of a man's soul over his flesh; each must attain it for himself, and it confers no power of helping others."

"And you talk of our cold English religions! The very coldest has more warmth, more humanity than yours!"

"Well," said Mr. Silchester, with another cold, bright smile, "I don't want to convert you, but I will presently impress you, and you will then be better able to judge my pretensions."

Rose remarked again, as he bent his head to look more closely into her face, the passionless, mesmeric glitter of his grey eyes, which fascinated her anew whenever he fixed them upon hers. It made her restless, and brought vague, wild fears of him into her mind, which every circumstance she had noted since her arrival tended to strengthen and encourage. Unwilling to remain any longer under the uncanny spell of his searching eyes, she rose with an effort, and, crossing the room, took up one by one the bottles on the table beside the bed, and examined the inscriptions. A glance at the dressing table mirror, as she did so, showed her that Mr. Silchester's eyes were still fixed upon her with curiosity and attention. She remembered the sick man's request that she should not appear too expert; and returning to the hearthrug, she stood in an attitude of hesitancy as she put a question to Mr. Silchester.

"What—er—have I to do? I was told, sir, that I should get full instructions from you as to my duties."

He answered very cordially. "Well, of course, I don't wish this unfortunate gentleman—by-the-bye, he won't tell his name, which is rather awkward—to

be left alone. When I am out I wish you to be here. And as I don't know what rash thing he might do in his evidently despondent state of mind, I should like you, if he wants anything fetched, or any message sent, to communicate the fact to me *first*. Do you see?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

Mr. Silchester went on in the same tone, so low that no word could reach the sick man, so clear that none could escape the nurse.

"I wish you also to send for me when the doctor comes. Don't leave the room yourself to look for me, but touch the bell and send some one to call me. I am scarcely ever further off than the reading-room or the smoking-room. Now as to the night, I sleep in the next room. There is no communicating door, but I could hear a tap on the wall, so there is no need for you to sit up with him."

Rose Revel smiled.

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "No nurse would leave her patient at night, I feel sure. Let me lie on the sofa here, and then if the gentleman wakes me up in the night I can call you, and ask you what to do."

"Very well," said Mr. Silchester approvingly. "Then I think I need not stay up here any longer; that is if you are not afraid to be left alone with him."

"Oh, no. I have been out as a nurse before, sir."

"Ah, yes, so you told me. In fact your get-up proves that. It is perfect, quite perfect." And he looked at her from head to foot with an approving smile. "All but the face," he added with a malicious shake of the head. "I am afraid you must confess that that betrays you—to me, only to me, of course," he added hastily and kindly, as Rose Revel's eyes drooped and she blushed. "Good-night."

Mr. Silchester held out his hand, a smooth, delicate, insinuating hand, with which he held hers in a grasp so firm, so light, and so characteristic, that Rose's fingers twitched, and she felt as if, by the mere pressure of palm to palm, this man with the cold, luminous eyes and oily tongue could penetrate the artifice by which she was deceiving him.

When he had left the room, Rose stood still by the fire and drew a long breath of relief. She had scarcely done so when she was startled by the sound of a husky laugh, and, turning towards the bed, she saw that the sick man was staring at the wall with wide-open, mocking eyes. As he did not speak to her, or appear in any way to be conscious of her presence, Rose sat down quietly without addressing a word to him, keeping careful watch without appearing to do so. Presently he uttered a weary sigh and his head fell a little forward. Rose got up and came quickly and noiselessly to the bedside.

"Do you think you could eat something now?" she asked.

Of course he shook his head. But she brought him some beef jelly in a cup on a little tray, and with the gentle, coaxing arts of her profession persuaded him to take it little by little. When he had finished it, he looked up into her face with a plaintive expression of reproach.

"You don't know what you are doing in keeping me alive," he said.

"I am doing—my duty; that is all I have to concern myself with until you take me into your confidence."

"Until! You think I shall then?"

"I think so; I hope so. Perhaps I might be able to do more for you then. And we nurses are like priests. We are accustomed to be trusted, and I think we generally deserve it."

The sick man listened in silence, but let her moisten the bandage on his ankle, and return to her seat by the fire without taking advantage of her suggestion. Rose wondered whether it was to guard against his doing himself an injury that she was enjoined to keep so strict a watch. For a sprained ankle is not an ailment which requires any such elaborate measures as had been taken in this case, and she could see no necessity for the constant

presence of a nurse specially summoned from a distance to attend the case.

The mystery which surrounded her patient had staved off any inclination for sleep on Rose Revel's part. She glanced from time to time at her patient, but could not discover whether he was awake, as he kept his head turned away and his eyes closed, and remained as motionless as ever.

The clock of St. John's church had struck twelve, and there had been no perceptible movement on the part of the sick man. Rose had forgotten him for the time, and was lost in gloomy thoughts. Presently she took from her pocket a letter, which she read through three or four times, slowly, with eager eyes which seemed to burn into the paper, and an expression of hardly-restrained agony on her strongly-marked features. As she read, she became so absorbed in the written words before her that she bent down over the letter lower and lower, and her shoulder heaved with repressed sobs.

Suddenly she was roused from her absorption by a sound from the bed. Looking up hastily and crushing the letter into her lap, Rose saw that the sick man had shifted his position; that, regardless of the consequences he had struggled up from his pillows and slid down to the middle of the bed, where, leaning forward towards her and clutching the bed-clothes

tightly, he sat devouring her with eyes which glowed in his pale face like danger signals in a mist. Rose started up, unable to repress an exclamation. But the sick man checked her utterances with an imperious gesture, and a glance at the wall in the direction of Mr. Silchester's apartment.

"Come here," he whispered eagerly, but in the lowest possible tones. "Sit here, close to me, in a chair, where I can see your face."

"I will do whatever you wish if you will be quiet and let me replace you comfortably," she answered in a voice no louder than his own.

She was quite as determined as he, and enforced her wishes without delay. When she had again arranged his pillows comfortably and ascertained that he had not displaced the bandages on his ankle, she brought a chair close to the bedside, and sat down in it, facing him. He began without further delay, with the same passionate eagerness as before.

"You love someone dearly, with your heart and soul?"

"Yes," said Rose in a whisper that was hoarse with a sudden thrill of passion.

"For whom you would give up your life, your soul? I see it in your eyes," he continued with fierce eagerness.

"Heaven knows I would!" burst from the woman's trembling lips.

"Ah!" said he, "I knew it. There is a look in your great eyes that only love and sorrow could bring there. You will have feeling—sympathy for me; I know it. Give me your hand."

Rose obeyed impulsively, and clasped his left hand, which lay nearest to her, in warm, firm fingers which communicated to the suffering man the healing and help of kindly human sympathy.

"You would marry him? You long for it with all your strength?" he asked.

Rose drew back a little, and answered with much less warmth.

"I am engaged to be married."

"And you love him from the bottom of your heart?"

"Oh! I—of course I like him—well enough."

"But it is not he you love like that, with passion with all your might?"

"Oh no. That is my sister"

Her voice shook on the word.

"She is dead?" he asked softly, with a gentle pressure of the hand.

"No, no, not that, but—dying, I am afraid."

"Dying! And you away!"

"I could do her no good. There is only one thing which could save her now."

"And what is that?"

"To pass the winter abroad. The cold of our climate here will kill her, we are afraid."

"Then why do you not send her away?"

"Ah, sir, need you ask that?"

"Well!"

"We cannot afford it."

"So!"

He asked no more, but lay for some minutes slowly stroking his beard, as if in deep thought, his eyes fixed on the counterpane. At last he raised his head, and gazed into her face long and penetratingly.

"You love your sister better than anything in the world, you say."

"Yes."

"What would you do, what would you give—to be able to send her for the winter wherever the doctor thought best, well-provided with money to obtain whatever she might want, to stay at the best hotel, to enjoy herself?"

"I would give," began Rose, tremulously. Then she broke off abruptly, and burst out in a bitter, fierce tone:—"I would give nothing, For I have nothing to give. What money I had saved is all gone—elsewhere."

"Your lover—your betrothed, does he ask money of you?"

Rose flushed scarlet.

"Young men are foolish," she said hurriedly. "They get themselves into difficulties—"

"But they should not want the woman who loves them to get them out," interrupted the sick man gravely.

"Why not?" returned Rose. "Who should a man come to for help but to the one who loves him?"

"Don't you see that he has already destroyed your love by doing so? He has lost your respect."

She shook her head.

"I feel for him very much as I have always done. I was never extravagantly fond of him. He is jealous of my sister. And he would not let me take an offer to go abroad, by which I could have saved money and could now have sent her away."

"Why don't you throw him over?"

"I would if he would let me. I would never have accepted him if he had not worried me into it. I think I love my sister too much to care for a man."

"Yet you would do nothing to help her?"

"I *can* do nothing."

"Do you think money is the only good? Have you not your service, your practised care, your woman's wit?"

"None of them are of any use in the case."

"But I say they are," rejoined the sick man, with rising excitement. "I say that if you are ready to

barter your service, your experience, your intellect for three, four, five hundred pounds, to send your sister to Algiers or Madeira, or where you will, there is in the world a man ready to make the bargain. You hear me? You understand?"

"I hear, but I don't understand," answered Rose in a troubled voice.

"I will explain, I will explain." And he bent eagerly forward.

But Rose got up from her chair greatly agitated.

"No, no," she said. "I must not listen. No man would make such an offer for honest service, and the temptation you hold out is so great that I don't trust my powers of resistance. Let me continue to be your good nurse, sir, without knowing who you are or what you want of me."

"You mistrust me already? Then to what end are your studies in physiognomy, by which you found out I was noble, disinterested and so forth? Are you not going suddenly to the other extreme of unreasonable mistrust?"

Rose hesitated.

"Will you not believe in my face so far as to listen to what I wish to tell you? Then I will leave you free to decide whether you will do my will or not."

She glanced at the sick man's face, at the grave eyes filled with dreamy earnestness, the well-closed noble

mouth. Then, bowing her head in acquiescence, she sat down again.

"You have heard of Sergania," he began. "It is only a little country about the size of your Scotland, but it has importance in the eyes of Russia because it does not belong to her. I dare say you know what the tactics of Russia are in such a case. She acquiesces in the establishment of a prince over this little country, harasses his government, stirs up revolt among his subjects, by one means or another gets rid of the prince, establishes another, pursues the same policy until the time is ripe to say to the world: 'See, this little country cries aloud for the strong yet merciful hand of the great Tzar. To restore peace, and order, and contentment, I take the poor little land under my protection. Henceforth it is part of Russia, endowed with all the blessings shed by the paternal government of that free and happy land. Seventeen years ago a king, approved by the great European Powers, accepted gladly by the people, was appointed in Sergania. He was one of those numerous German princes of deep pride and shallow purse, long title and short territory, at whom you English people are so fond of railing. But he was a conscientious man, of ambition and energy, glad to find an opening for his cramped activity, honorably ready to devote himself heart and soul to the welfare of the people over

whom he was to rule. His efforts were appreciated and rewarded. He worked early and late, he strove with all his might for the good of his adopted people, and they recognized him as an honest man and blessed him. Nevertheless sorrow did not spare him. The new climate proved fatal, one by one as the years went on, to his children and to his wife, whom he loved as the light of his eyes; until at last he was left with only one, a son, and he a weakling. Still he struggled on with his duty, and would not desert, even for his child's sake, the land and the people he had made his own. But at last, when he had grown grey-headed and old, and when, by his exertions and his constant love, his fierce, half-civilized subjects were increasing daily in prosperity and peace, the evil angel who was always hovering jealously over king and country spread his black wings; and in the shadow of them all fair things shrivelled and died, and the peace of that nation was gone like a dream."

The sick man, feeble and inert no longer, sat erect, hissed out the slow words in a burning whisper, and spread out his thin hands with an impressive gesture, to illustrate the falling of this dark shadow on the unhappy land. Rose listened in utter silence, touched by his earnestness, wondering what the coming revelation would be. In the same low, deep tones he continued:—

"The king knew that the end was coming. The discontented, who exist in every country out of heaven, were stirred into revolt. Russian money circulated among his courtiers—courtiers are the class most susceptible to corruption in the world—but other classes followed, until disaffection had spread far and wide throughout the country. Twice the king's life was threatened; he did not care for that, he had done a life's work, and if it had not been for his son, he would have given up the fight gladly. But before he died, he must provide for the safety of his only child. At last, harassed on every side, his person threatened, his authority disregarded, he determined to make one last effort, to seek the protection of a foreign power for his son, its assistance for himself."

The sick man's voice was getting lower, his tone more earnest still.

"They left the country secretly, as the father thought, giving out that he was on a visit to a country house of his, where he always lived the retired life of a private gentleman. They reached the country to which they were bound; it was familiar to the king; he had been at college there. They arrived at the capital, alone, and as they thought, unknown; put up at an hotel. The father, believing they were safe, left his son in the hotel—for he was delicate and the rapid journey had tried his strength—while he called

at the house of the chief minister, whom he had formerly known. The minister was out of town. The king returned to the hotel where he had left his son, and found that he was gone. A gentleman, so said the manager, had called and told him that his father had sent for him. Now this," continued the sick man, raising his voice and stretching forth his right hand in passionate excitement, "was a subterfuge—a lie. I had *not* sent for him!"

"You!" cried Rose Revel, rising to her feet, in bewilderment. "Then you are——"

"The king."

He had scarcely uttered the word when there was a knock at the door, which Rose had taken the precaution to lock. Her patient made one rapid gesture of caution, and sank back into his former apparently lethargic state. Rose crossed the room and opened the door a very little way. Mr. Silchester was there, his dressing-gown wrapped round him, with the accustomed smile on his face.

"I am afraid you are having some trouble with your patient; I heard a voice," said he. "Let me help you."

"No, don't come in, sir," said Rose, stamping her foot, and glancing at the bed with an assured expression of harsh impatience; "I can manage him. He's gone raving mad now—says he is a king?"

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Silchester, with the same immovable smile.

"But I'll quiet him, you may be sure. He shan't disturb you again, sir. See, he's as still as a lamb. I've shown him I won't stand any nonsense. I've done right, I hope, sir?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Silchester.

She had drawn aside the screen, so that he could see the patient lying back quietly on his pillow. With a nod of entire approval of her avowed harshness, Mr. Silchester withdrew.

Rose re-locked the door with a shudder.

CHAPTER IV.

A ROYAL BARGAIN.

ROSE REVEL listened until she heard the key turn in the lock of Mr. Silchester's door, and then went to the bedside. Her patient was listening too.

"Is he in his room, do you think?" he whispered.

"Yes," answered Rose, in the same tone. "At least I heard the creaking of the door, and the turning of the key." And she added in the lowest of whispers,—*"Your Majesty."*

The fugitive king turned his eyes upon her with a sad smile.

"No, call me as you did before. I have no majesty left now. And I think I have no empty vanity left for empty titles. Come nearer. Whether that man is listening or not, I must speak to you to-night. Perhaps I may never have the opportunity again."

Rose could not answer. The mystery and interest which surrounded the figure of the unhappy king were so strong that she felt already that she was prepared to do whatever he might want of her. She began, too, to have some idea as to what his wishes

might be. Standing close to the bed, therefore, with head respectfully bent, she listened to the rest of his story.

"I told you," he went on, "that my boy had been taken away. I was scarcely in the right possession of my senses. The people of the hotel were kind, stranger as I was ; they did not know my reasons for believing my boy to be in evil hands ; they assured me he would come back. I knew better. I found out that he and the man who had taken him had gone away in a hansom, called from a cabrank close by. I questioned the other cabmen there, and so tracked out the man who had driven them, and learnt from him that they had alighted at Euston Station. This confirmed a suspicion I had conceived that there was an intention of carrying my boy off to America. I took a ticket to Liverpool, and scarcely noticing what I did or said, or what companions I had for my journey, I took my place in a train which was on the point of starting. For some time I remained in a sort of dream, trying to imagine what fate was in store for my poor inexperienced boy. At last I was roused by a man's voice, and I saw for the first time that I had one companion—the person who has since introduced himself to me as Mr. Silchester."

"Then you don't think that is his name, sir ?"

"No ; I believe that he has been set on to track me, to betray me."

"You thought so from the first, sir?"

"No. I took him for an English gentleman."

"And now?"

"For a Russian spy."

"Then he must be a very clever one."

"So clever that when he spoke to me, saying civil things on indifferent subjects, working his way in a measure into my confidence, until I avowed that I had lost my son, I had no suspicion of him, or of his offers of advice and help. He was spending the night in Liverpool, he said; he would take me to a good hotel, do all in his power to help me. Still, I suspected nothing until this morning. He had offered to take me to the offices of the steamers to make inquiries, and had even pretended to find out yesterday that no vessel was leaving, or had left for New York that day. At the last moment, however, his cleverness failed him. I knew as I fell downstairs that my sprained ankle was no accident, and I was unwise enough to let him see that I knew it. At least that is my impression."

"I wonder," said Rose, thoughtfully, "if he is really a spy, and worse, as you think, that he trusted any one but himself to remain with you, sir?"

"He has some business in this town, whether it concerns me or not I do not know. He was forced to trust some one a little; if it had not been for the

happy accident which brought you here by mistake, I should have been now in the hands of a woman whom he could trust thoroughly."

"Instead of which, sir, you are in the hands of a person whom *you* can trust thoroughly."

"Indeed, I believe so," answered the king, gravely. "And now I will tell you what I want you to do. You are a woman of brains, of education, with a splendid face——"

Rose smiled.

"For my purpose," added the king, noticing her expression. "A face which is a libel on its owner, until some moment comes when the real feeling flashes through. Take care that those moments do not come in the presence of the gentleman whom we perforce call Mr. Silchester. I want you, if he is alive, to find my son, to watch over him, to devote your care to him, as you do to me. I am afraid I have trained my boy unwisely. Bearing always in view that he was to rule my kingdom when I was gone, I have been too intent on the scholarly training of his mind, have dwelt too much on the importance of book knowledge, to the neglect of some needful qualities of alertness and caution, perhaps even to the injury of his physical health. So that he is peculiarly unfitted to battle with hostile wits. I want you not to rest in your search until you find him, alive or

dead. If my boy has already fallen a victim to the will of the Tzar, you can do nothing more but inform my executors of all the circumstances. But if Siegfried is alive, you are to watch over him as if he were your own child, on any pretence you please to keep near him, to strengthen him for the trials of a Sovereign, or for the struggles of a Pretender, to care for his life as you would for your own, for the sake of the health and ease which I try to bestow on your beloved sister."

His voice ceased suddenly, and he remained looking with intent eyes upon her face.

"But, sir," began Rose, hesitatingly, in the same low tones that both had used throughout the conversation, "you will be able to do all this yourself much better than I. I would indeed, if I could, carry out your wishes to the letter, but what can I do more than you?"

"Just so much as the living can do more than the dead;" solemnly answered the fugitive king. "I am not delirious, or dreaming. Feel my pulse, look into my eyes. But just so surely as your young hand lies quivering on my old one, so surely am I lying on a bed from which I shall never rise again."

Rose shivered. It was not difficult, so grey and drawn with suffering did his face look in the lamp-light, to imagine his words prophetic.

"Oh no," she said, trying to speak cheerfully, but in a voice which shook in spite of herself. "Wait until I bring your son to you, or take you to him."

He interrupted her, laying his hand with an abrupt movement on her arm.

"Fulfil that promise," said he emphatically, looking straight into her eyes. "You will not be able to bring my son to me on earth; bring him to me, without reproach as he now is, in heaven."

Rose bowed her head. An instinct of energy and determination, such as, with all her force of character, she had never before known, sprang up in her and told her she would try. The fugitive went on:

"If you succeed in finding my boy, as something in your fiery black eyes tells me you will, you will have first to see Lord Melpas, the minister, on his behalf. I have written to him, and prepared him for our coming. You will find him charming to speak to, but difficult to induce to take action where no immediate benefit to himself or his party is concerned. But he is an old acquaintance of mine, and perhaps the circumstances may do something."

"Will you not write to him again yourself now, sir? I will take care that the letter is not intercepted."

"On *this* side of the post. But on the other.— Ah, young lady, you have not been in diplomacy.

Listen. My son, when he is old enough, is to marry the Princess Otilie von Marienburg. They have not yet been formally betrothed, on account of their youth, but her father and I have arranged it together, and he is a man of his word. I have his promise in writing, and he mine. I wish this arrangement to be carried out at all hazards. She is now in England, at Scarborough, where she is staying with English friends. I wish my son to live in England, sufficiently near to make the acquaintance of the Princess, who is, in common with him, in ignorance of our intentions with regard to their marriage. They are both amiable, well-looking, and of the same refined tastes and accomplishments, in every way admirably suited to each other. She is heiress to her father's property, which is large, and that will assist my son when the time comes—as it will come—when the people I have ruled over cry out for the son of their king, and, backed by the voice of Europe, my son will wear in peace the crown I have borne for seventeen years in struggle and strife."

He stopped as suddenly as before, but only for a few moments. Still holding her fascinated eyes under the spell of his, he asked :

"Are you willing to undertake such a charge as this?"

"Yes," whispered Rose, who felt as if she was under a spell.

"Give me the pocket-book you took downstairs with you."

Rose went to the wardrobe, and took it from the shelf on which she had placed it. The king took it from her, opened it, counted out notes, to the value of five hundred pounds, and held the little bundle of crisp papers, the very rustle of which was like a breeze of hope and health for her sister, towards her. But she hesitated and drew back, with her eyes turned away from the splendid temptation.

"I cannot take it," she said in a low voice, very quietly pressing the palms of her hands together, as if to shut out the possibility of their receiving the bribe. "You say, sir, that you are poor, and that your son is an exile. Now, supposing your fears for yourself were well-grounded, how could I take what is the right of your son?"

The sick man smiled.

"I told you I was poor when I was chosen king. But the laborer is worthy of his hire, and I have saved money during these seventeen years. I am fond of money; I am never lavish with it; and if I offer five hundred pounds, believe me, king though I am, I do not give it for a small thing. See, here is health and happiness for your beloved sister, in return for your promise to cherish and protect my beloved son."

"But if I should not be able to find him? If, supposing I found him, I could not give him the protection you speak of? What am I? A weak woman, and your enemies. If your fears are justified, are clever men with a great power behind them. What safety could I offer the child?"

"Well, it is my humor to believe you can save my boy. I have my superstitions, like all other men, and they are stronger than reason. - If I am ready to trust you, why should not you accept the trust?"

Rose reflected for a few moments.

"I do," she said then very quietly.

"You swear that you will endeavor, by every means in your power, to find my boy, to keep near him, and to guard his health and protect him to the utmost limit of your ability?"

"To the utmost extent of my power, I swear I will."

She bowed her head, and accepted with bended knee the notes which the king held out to her, as if this offering and accepting were part of a religious ceremony. And indeed this was the case with her. For she had longed and prayed, with the despairing earnestness of one who dares not even hope for an answer to his prayer, for some way of procuring for her darling sister the change which might be the means of saving her life. The sick man watched her, with a curious smile upon his thin lips.

"Weak woman!" he repeated to himself softly.

When Rose had put the notes safely away and her face had resumed its usual expression, the sick man asked her what she thought of the contract by which she had just bound herself.

"I think," she answered, "that I have made a very good bargain. For I see every reason to hope that within a week you will laugh at the fear for yourself and your little son which induced you to make it, while I shall be radiant at having received such splendid payment for doing nothing."

"You will see," said he gravely.

Shortly afterwards, at his request, Rose arranged for the night the bandage on his ankle, and settled herself to sleep in the big armchair.

The next morning both nurse and patient expected an early visit from Mr. Silchester. They both breakfasted, and then waited impatiently for the coming of the man whom they feared. At length the sick man suggested that Rose should knock at his door, and find out whether he was in his room. She did so, but there was no answer. She knocked a second time and a third with the same result. Then, turning the handle, she opened the door, put her head in a little way, and asked respectfully :

"Mr. Silchester, I beg your pardon, but can I speak to you for one minute?"

There was no one in the room. The bed had been made, and everything was in perfect order. Rose slipped in, and examined the name and the labels on a large brown portmanteau, which was the only article of luggage visible. The letters F. S. were painted on it in white, a visiting card with the words "Mr. Frank Silchester, Lincoln's Inn," was inserted in a little case made for it on the top. Luggage labels, with the names of places in Holland, France, Germany, Scotland, and America, were pasted the one over the other in all directions. There was also one label bearing the name Bombay. Rose examined the outside of the portmanteau minutely, and even went so far as to examine the fastening. It was securely locked with a very elaborate and strong kind of lock. From this she turned to look carefully round the room. Mr. Silchester was a careful man, and he either intended to travel this morning, or was used to start off at a moment's notice. For there was not so much as a glove or a hair-brush on the dressing-table; nothing but part of a ticket for a stall at the "Gaiety," and an empty bottle which had contained some choice perfume. On the floor, clinging to the edge of one of the window curtains, were a few small feathers—common chicken feathers, Rose thought; being in a suspicious mood, she picked them up, and found that they were not out of the pillows, for among them

was a tail-feather between three and four inches long. After spending a few moments in conjectures as to the meaning of this strange find, she put the feathers back where she had found them, and was leaving the room, when she caught sight of the corner of what she took for another portmanteau protruding from under the bed. She drew it a little way out, and found it to be a small square trunk of the same brown leather as the portmanteau, but much less battered in appearance, and with no labels on it. It was fastened by two heavy locks, and the letters F. S. were marked upon it in holes about the size of a small pea, which were apparently pierced right through the leather. There was a canvas cover for the trunk on the floor beside it.

Rose Revel drew the trunk right out and lifted it up with strong curiosity. For it seemed to her, as she bent down over it, that a faint sibilant sound came from it; and her mind, from thoughts of scheming Russians, passed on to Nihilists, and then to infernal machines, without much reason perhaps. Dynamite is heavy, as she knew, and the trunk was not. Of other explosives, however, she knew nothing, and whether the sound she heard could come from a clock-work machine she could not guess. But she put the trunk back where she had found it, with her mind full of misgivings and wild surmises.

She had scarcely risen from her knees when she heard faintly the voice of a man singing softly to himself. As the sound came a little nearer, and before she had time to reach the door, she recognized the voice as that of Mr. Silchester. It was too late to leave the room without being seen. There was a little slip of a dressing-room, only just large enough to hold a bath, a chair, and a row of pegs on the wall. She went into it, and closed the door softly. Then she heard Mr. Silchester enter his room, unlock his portmanteau, take something out, lock it again, singing softly to himself all the time as before. She heard the creak of his looking-glass as he tilted it to a convenient angle, and she fancied she detected a sigh of self-satisfaction as he looked in it. Then she heard him shake on to his handkerchief a few drops of perfume, reopen his portmanteau, lock it again, leave the room, and go down the corridor, softly singing all the time. When the last sound of his voice had died away altogether, Rose slipped out of the dressing-room, crossed the bedroom, where the fragrance of a very delicate perfume still hung in the air, and opened the door softly.

And behold ! Mr. Silchester was standing outside. Waiting for her, there could be no doubt of that ; with the pleasantest smile in the world upon his face, a very tiny cigarette between his lips, looking more

placidly handsome and faultlessly well-dressed than ever. The sight threw Rose off her guard. She made a step back, with an exclamation. Mr. Silchester laughed and held out his hand.

"Caught!" he said, without the least appearance of ill-humor, as Rose recovering herself, walked stiffly out of the room.

She closed the door behind her, and boldly took his proffered hand.

"You startled me, sir," she said very respectfully. "I had just come to look for you."

"Then why hide yourself when I came? My dear Mrs. Revel," he continued, in the same good-humored and indulgent tone, "I know all about you, so that dissimulation on your part is thrown away."

Rose was silent. She guessed that Mr. Silchester's information really referred to the woman she had, at first by accident and afterwards by design, replaced. He continued, after looking at her steadily for a few moments with that constant smile which she began to find irritating:

"Would you like for a few minutes to see yourself as others see you, madam? Believe me, I don't wish to put you to unnecessary pain, but only to show you how sadly you would be wasting your time if you were to try in any way to deceive *me*."

"Very well," said Rose, in a low, sullen tone, her

heart beating with excitement at the strange situation in which she found herself placed.

Mr. Silchester drew from a pocket in his coat an opened letter, in an envelope directed to him. Rose was near enough to him to see that the postmark was London, and that it had been posted on the previous day. The writing was in a small foreign hand. Mr. Silchester had apparently no objection to her satisfying herself as to the genuineness of the letter, and she was able to follow the greater part of what he proceeded to read out to her.

"MONSIEUR,

"I receive your amiable and esteemed letter this morning. I thank you of the honor you make me, and assure you I shall make myself worthy of the recommendation that one has given me to you. I send you a person who suit you perfectly. She has been employed as a nurse before, and could deceive a doctor. I have such hold on her that she will do what you please for fear of me; for she has been in prison several times, and has been accused of to poison her husband, which she believes I could prove. Her looks are bad, but she is worth of confidence for you. Accept, Monsieur, the assurance of my humble gratitude.

"HELENE LANDEGHEM."

Rose Revel's eyes followed Mr. Silchester's eagerly; she felt giddy and sick with terror and revolt at the thought of the idea this letter had caused him to conceive of her. Following her first impulse, she

burst out indignantly, as he finished the letter and put it carefully back into his pocket-book:

"You don't really think that is a description of me! Do I look like an escaped gaol-bird? Besides, I have never been married!"

Mr. Silchester laughed gently.

"I don't doubt you for a moment," said he, in the blandest of voices. "I can quite believe that you have never been married, and that this is a very imperfect description of you I feel sure. But as for not looking like—well, a lady who has occasionally undergone enforced periods of seclusion, I am afraid I cannot agree with you."

Rose Revel did not answer. While her heart was still beating fast with excitement and anger, she remembered that it was by her own free will she had placed herself in this equivocal position, and that it was with a definite and good purpose she had done so. Until that purpose was fulfilled, and she had found means either to restore to the sick father his lost child, or, at least, to bring to the bedside of the king some trustworthy friend, she would accept the ugly identity she now found forced upon her, since she could re-establish her own when she chose. While this determination shaped itself rapidly in her mind, Mr. Silchester was still standing by, apparently occupied with no deeper thought than the enjoyment of a second cigarette. But at last he said:

"Why are you angry? You see I think none the worse of you for these unfortunate little accidents. On the contrary, they render a woman interesting; they make the less adventurous members of your sex seem dull and commonplace. You have nothing difficult or dangerous to do for me, and I shall certainly not interfere with your chance of profiting by the generosity" (he laid a slight stress on the word) "of our unfortunate patient."

Rose raised her head.

"I never killed my husband," she murmured, feeling impelled to clear herself of this charge at all events.

Mr. Silchester looked at her with gentle reproach.

"Now that is unworthy of you," said he, "for you are a woman of superior intelligence, and I had taken you for one of superior courage. Half the ladies I know would send their husbands to a better world if they dared, and with very good reason. Why should you be ashamed of the only action which really raises you out of the ruck of womankind? Besides, denial of one's crimes, except in a court of justice, is vulgarly commonplace, and ought to be beneath you. Now return to your post, and if you should again wish to make yourself acquainted with the details of my personal luggage, I shall be very happy to put my services at your disposal, to initiate you into the mysteries of

hat-box, portmanteau and umbrella. And now, madam, I must wish you good-morning."

Taking Rose's hand very gently in his, Mr. Silchester placed his lips upon it with a light kiss, and entered his room, leaving her a prey to mortification and bewilderment, from which she had not recovered when, a minute later, she re-entered her patient's apartment.

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CHAPTER V.

MR. SILCHESTER SAYS GOOD-BYE.

ROSE REVEL had accepted the trust of her mysterious patient, the exiled King of Sergania, on an impulse which was the result of gratitude, romantic pity and an inborn and hitherto unsatisfied love of adventure. But to find herself, in consequence of this act, looked upon as an experienced criminal was a discovery so revolting that, as Mr. Silchester left her standing outside the door of the sick man's room, she felt that she would give the world to be free from the pledge she had taken, and to be able to escape from the sombre drama in which she felt that she was destined to play an important part. But she had that morning taken a step which she knew to be irrevocable, and it was with a feeling that she had decided her own fate, in some unknown and tragic manner, that she opened the door of the sick-room.

The patient was awake, watching for her coming.

"Ah!" he said eagerly, as soon as he caught sight of her, "you have been with him. He has told you something—you will believe my presentiments, my warnings, now."

For Rose, glancing at herself in the glass, saw that the emotions of the last twenty minutes had left their unmistakable impress on her face, which was white and drawn. She went to the bedside and took the sick man's hand.

"Yes," she said, "I have seen him, and I can understand your feelings better than I did. I, too, feel that he is dangerous. You are mistaken indeed, sir, if you think such a woman as I could cope with such a man as he."

The exile struggled into a sitting position, and gazed into her face with an expression of cold suspicion which wounded and offended her.

"You regret your bargain, you wish to retreat," he said shortly.

"It is too late, unfortunately," she answered in a tone of rebellious bitterness; "I sent the money to my sister this morning."

An expression of intense relief and satisfaction passed over the face of the king as she uttered these last words.

"I have sold myself into a service in which I can do no good to your child, but which exposes me to great danger from this man, this Silchester," she continued, unable to subdue her anger.

"You should have weighed all this before," said the sick man indifferently. "And you have probably saved your sister's life."

"I would have found means to do that somehow, without this," said Rose passionately.

"That is childish. You accepted my offer as the only course open to you. I cannot keep you to your contract, for I am a dying man. Nothing is simpler for you therefore than to forget me, my son, and the bargain you don't wish to keep, as soon as the breath has left my body."

The king spoke with cold contempt, and Rose's cheeks tingled as she listened. As a matter of fact, his doubts of her were only assumed. Accustomed to the study of men and women, he knew that the passion with which she uttered her tardy regrets was the result of her feeling that she was eternally bound by her bargain. He had at once detected in her a strong, upright nature and a keen intelligence; and not caring a straw for her except as the only possible means by which he could try to secure some care for his lost child, he did not concern himself further with her distress, being in truth completely engrossed by his own. His coldness struck fire from the passionate heart of the young nurse. She drew herself up and answered him in a subdued voice, every tone of which thrilled with indignant pride.

"You may be satisfied, sir, that I shall keep my word."

And in the glance the king gave, she saw that he believed her.

The rest of the morning passed almost in silence. Only once Rose ventured to disturb the sick man by a suggestion. It was while she was giving him his medicine.

"I should be very glad, sir," she said deferentially, "if you would allow me to communicate with some of your friends. I would set to work at once to try to discover your son, if only I could leave you in the hands of some one who would take care of you and cheer you—some one you know and trust."

"A king never knows whom he can trust," answered the exile. "If I allowed you to write to one of the most devoted of my professed adherents I might be opening for my darling son the way to Siberia."

"Sir, you must forgive me for saying so, but your unhappy experience has poisoned your mind. I know it is possible that a court may be corrupt; but surely there never existed a society of men, at court or anywhere else, who were all corrupt, all treacherous. I can answer for it, sir, there were some natures about you noble enough to be touched by your misfortunes, and loyal to the last drop of their blood."

"But if any such existed, I could not distinguish the true protestations from the false; so how am I the better off for them?"

"Was there no man about you, sir, in whom **you** had confidence?"

"There was one young man, a Scotchman, my son's tutor, in whose loyalty I believed I could confide. But he was a fool and a pedant, and would have been of no use in an emergency."

"A fool!" echoed Rose, surprised. "I thought there were no fools in Scotland, except the absolutely half-witted. Perhaps, sir, you did him injustice."

"Perhaps," said the king, indifferently.

"If he is so devotedly loyal, sir, he might still do you service. May I write to him and tell him where you are?"

"I think not," answered the king with a faint smile. "Solitude would be preferable to the sole society of Donald Keith."

Rose made a mental note of the name, resolved to try later to discover the address of this remarkable Scotchman; for she was particularly anxious to re-establish communication between the exiled king and his friends. The day went on without incident until late in the afternoon, when a knock at the door announced Mr. Silchester, who entered, dressed, as if for a journey. He approached the sick man with many softly uttered words of inquiry and kindness, begged him to excuse his apparent neglect in not having called earlier in the day, regretted that he was obliged to go away hurriedly on business which would keep him in London for some days, and finally

commended him heartily to the care of this kind, good Mrs. Revel, who would, Mr. Silchester felt sure, continue to bestow upon him the same faithful care and devotion which she had already shown. All this the suave gentleman babbled out in a pleasantly soft and musical voice, without seeming in the least affected by the cold silence maintained by the person whom he was addressing. At last, however, he turned, with an almost imperceptible knitting of the brows, to the nurse.

"I have to start almost immediately," he said. "I have been summoned away hurriedly. Am I asking too great a favor if I request you to be kind enough to help me a little in the last throes of my packing. Your lady's fingers will be neater than mine. Would you kindly finish what I have left undone while I go as far as the post-office to make some inquiries?"

"Certainly, sir," said Rose, who instantly made up her mind that Mr. Silchester's unexpected request had some deeper-lying motive than that which he offered.

The traveler glanced deprecatingly at the patient on the bed and gently shrugged his shoulders.

"I am afraid I only disturb him," he said, in a subdued tone of regret, to Rose. "He can think of nothing but this little boy he says he has lost. Listen as well as you can to the ravings he sometimes utters; by piecing them together we may be able to

find out something about him, and to help him if we can."

"Yes, sir," said Rose with assumed docility, as she followed Mr. Silchester out of the room.

He left her at once, only reiterating his thanks for her kindness, as he pushed open the door of his room and showed her part of the contents of his portmanteau strewn about the floor. Rose entered the apartment and set about packing without delay. There was not much to do, and nothing to note except the delicate fineness of the linen and such pretty fopperies as gold-backed hair brushes and razors with tortoise-shell handles. When she had finished packing the portmanteau, the leather-covered box which had so greatly excited her curiosity caught her eye. The locks were unfastened. Rose lifted the lid with her heart beating fast. Inside was a second lid, perforated like the outer one, and fastened by a strap and buckle. She undid this, lifted the lid and looked in. The box was divided into two compartments, each of which contained—a hat. Rose took them out, found that there was absolutely nothing besides in either compartment, and replaced them with a smile of great shrewdness.

"That was why he wanted me to do his packing!" said she to herself, with an odd sense of rising enjoyment of this exciting game of mystification. "I was

to find out that this leather box contained nothing but hats. So now he has succeeded in convincing me that it was made for some entirely different purpose."

She raised the box in her arms, and discovered that it was considerably less heavy than it had been the previous day. She further found that, one hat being smaller than the other, both could be placed in the same compartment, leaving the second free. Having stimulated her curiosity tenfold by these discoveries, Rose, seeing that she could for the present learn no more, put the box as she had found it and returned to her patient's room. She had not been there five minutes when again Mr. Silchester's light tap-tap was heard at the door, and putting his head in, he beckoned her out into the corridor. The 'boots' was taking his portmanteau downstairs, but Rose did not see the leather-covered box. Mr. Silchester held out a gracious hand.

"Good-bye, madam, for the present," he said, beaming upon Rose as she rather reluctantly shook hands. "I shall return in a day or two, and by that time I expect that our unfortunate patient may be able to give us more definite details as to who he is and who his friends are. Remember, whatever he says you are to treasure up in your mind and report to me. As for payment, you shall not have reason to complain.

And that you may believe this, here is something to go on with until I return."

Into Rose's hand he tried to slip a heavy little packet, but she drew back quickly, and it fell to the ground with a clinking sound. Mr. Silchester stooped to pick it up with a little mocking laugh.

"Ha, ha! Afraid, are we? Surely, my child, you are old enough to know that gold is worth all the risks it can bring?"

Rose took the packet in a limp, reluctant hand, afraid to refuse it a second time. But as Mr. Silchester, with a sort of faint echo of his laugh to himself, disappeared at the end of the corridor, she went back into the sick-room and threw the money into a cupboard by the side of the fireplace. The patient, lying, as usual, with closed eyes, looked round quickly.

"What was that?" he asked.

Rose, making a strong effort to subdue her excitement, gave him full particulars of the events of the morning and of her last interview with Mr. Silchester. The exiled king seemed to pay but little attention to her account of the mysterious leather box, but to her surprise, when she came to her first rejection of the money, his face assumed an expression of cynical contempt, followed by doubt.

"How much did he offer you?" he asked.

"I don't know. I threw it into the cupboard just now."

"Let me see it."

Rose opened the cupboard, and taking out the despised packet, laid it on the bed. The exile opened it, and, pouring out a little stream of gold, counted the pieces with interest and almost tender regard.

"Here are thirty pounds," said he. "This, then," he added musingly, "may be looked upon, I suppose, as the present market-price of a king—"

"But, sir," interrupted Rose in eager pleading, "I am sure you know that I would not take it on any account. I only pretended to for fear of rousing his suspicion."

The king looked anxious rather than reassured.

"But, why not?" said he. "I believe you, for nothing would have been easier than to hide from me the fact that you had received this money. But I grieve rather than rejoice. For, if you are so foolish as not to value the devil's best gift, how can you be wise enough to protect my boy from such crafty enemies as he will have?"

"But, sir, the money was given to buy my services against you. It would have been dishonest to take payment for a service I did not mean to perform."

"I am disappointed in you," said the king. "I thought you were a woman who could fight the devil with the devil's weapons."

"Perhaps, sir, you may not have to be disappointed

in me after all. And if I am willing to fight his black majesty in a very determined manner, you will not complain if I carry on the warfare in my own way."

The king looked at her earnestly before he answered; looked at the flashing black eyes, bright with daring and determination, staring before her with unmistakable honesty of purpose, and with the far-away expression of stimulated imagination; looked at the well-cut mouth, which had full, tender curves, but which closed in a straight, firm line indicative of her resolute character.

"You begin to believe now, then, that I have not paid you for services which are imaginary only?"

"I believe, sir," answered Rose with a troubled expression, "that I may perhaps be able to serve you by putting you in communication with some of your friends, and I am resolved to do so if I can."

But he read in her face that she was prepared for a great deal more than this, and he presently sank back, satisfied.

By-and-bye the doctor came. He was a youngish man, and did not give, to the experienced eyes of the nurse, many signs of special capacity or intelligence. He was quite right in pronouncing the sprained ankle as a slight affair, and in expressing the opinion that the patient need not keep entirely to his bed; but he seemed scarcely to notice the

black depression under which the invalid was laboring, and was much more interested in trying to discover when Mr. Silchester, who had evidently impressed him greatly, would return.

"In a day or two, so he told me," said Rose coldly, as she accompanied the doctor to the door.

"Ah, well, I shall be looking in again, and hope I shall meet him. One of the most agreeable men I ever met; don't you think so?"

"Until I have made the acquaintance of the rest of the men you have met, I'm afraid I cannot give an opinion," said Rose with scant civility.

She had looked forward to the visit of the doctor, hoping to find in him a person to whom she could confide some of her perplexities; and she could not keep her disappointment out of her tone and manner, especially as the young practitioner had shown more than the usual amount of suspicion which the first sight of her beetle-brows always raised.

When he had gone she returned to the bedside, and asked her patient whether he would like to take advantage of the doctor's permission to get up for a little while.

The exiled king, who had not once in the course of the day lost any of his melancholy, shook his head.

"No," he answered, in a low voice, "I shall stay here to the end."

Rose grew impatient. The words "obstinate old thing!" were in her heart, though she did not let them rise to her lips.

"I don't see what reason you can have for fear, sir, now that Mr. Silchester has gone away. At least you might rest in peace until he comes back again."

The king turned upon her eyes full of despondent prophecy.

"How do you know whether he has gone away?" he asked significantly.

"One of the chambermaids told me that he had left some of his things locked in the dressing-room till he returns."

"But you do not know how soon that will be. His master likes his work done quickly."

Rose began to think that constant brooding over his misfortunes was at last affecting his brain. She made no answer, and her patient also relapsing into silence, they passed a long time without further conversation. She had lighted the candles and remained in her usual place by the fire, occupied alternately by ponderings on her strange compact, its effect on her sister's life and her own, and the mysterious case under her charge. At half-past five she brought him some tea and an egg, and, as usual, had to exercise all her powers of persuasion to induce him to eat it. When she had carried away the tray



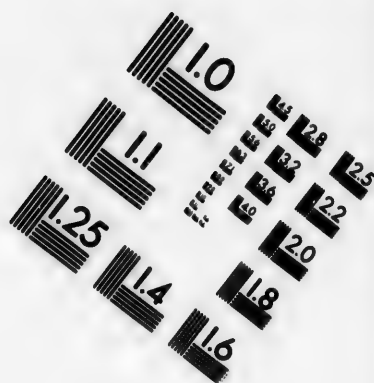
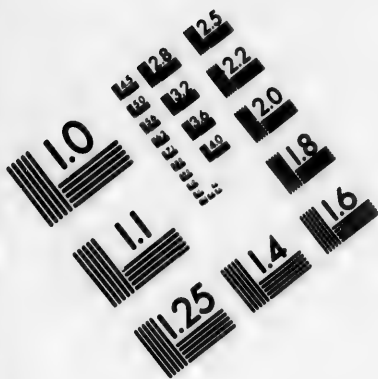
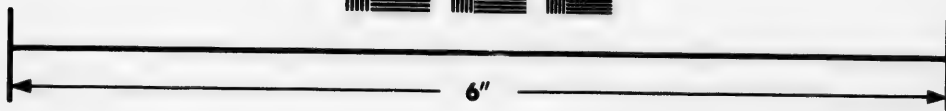
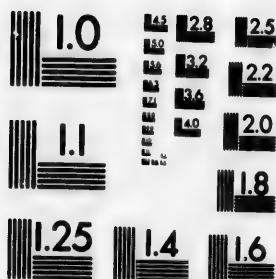


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and reached the door with it, he stopped her, calling to her in a firmer and stronger voice than she had yet heard him use.

"Are you going downstairs, nurse?"

"Only to take this tray down, sir, and to speak to the manageress about sending up something you would like at eight o'clock."

"You need not trouble to do that, I shall want nothing more. But go down and have your tea downstairs. You want change from this dull room, and I feel inclined for sleep."

Rose hesitated. He looked a little better; his face had lost some of its deadly pallor, he spoke in a more natural voice. But she did not like to leave him.

"You can go, don't be afraid. I have had some reassuring thoughts this afternoon, and I think I am getting better."

He made her a kindly gesture of dismissal, and Rose, not quite satisfied, but unable to give a reason for her feeling of uneasiness, slowly left the room and went downstairs. She hesitated for a few minutes on reaching the ground floor, and then, opening the door of the coffee room, she glanced round it, and was immediately attracted by the figure of a gentleman in one of the far corners whose face was completely hidden by the newspaper which he was reading. Rose could scarcely tell how she recognized him, but

she withdrew, convinced that this was the man whom she had seen, on her arrival at the hotel, meet the gentleman whom she had since known as Mr. Silchester in a mysterious manner on the staircase. She was somewhat disturbed by this discovery, for the case in which she was engaged was so full of mysteries that every small circumstance which could be in any way connected with it afforded food for fresh fears.

Rose then went to the office, gave some directions to the person she found in charge there, and was invited by her to have tea in the manageress' private room. This deputy was a young woman of about eight-and-twenty, with a worn but beautiful face and brusque, impulsive manners. She had "taken a fancy to the nurse," as she expressed it; and Rose found it easy to discover, by leading her fluent chatter in the right direction, what was known at the hotel about Mr. Silchester. This proved to be a little more than she had expected. He had been there a good many times, always left suddenly, and was understood to be a London solicitor, whose business took him much abroad.

"At first we took him for a commercial, because he often hired the use of a cupboard, or of the little dressing-room, in the room he generally has, to keep some of his luggage in. But he's too much of a swell

for that, and then somebody came who'd seen him in London, and he says he thinks he is a lawyer and lives in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Rose listened to all this attentively, but it did not help her much, for she felt convinced that Mr. Silchester was too confidential on the one hand, and too mysterious on the other, for a solicitor. While her informant still chattered on, and Rose was framing a question concerning the other gentleman who had roused her curiosity, she suddenly fancied that she saw, through the open door which led into the office, Mr. Silchester, in the distance, pass quickly through the hall in the direction of the staircase.

She started up with an expression of face which drew forth a little scream from her voluble companion.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked she. A delicate regard for grammar was not one of the pretty young woman's strong points.

"Did you not see some one pass?" asked Rose, trying to hide an emotion, a terror she could not account for.

"No," answered the other in great surprise. "I didn't see any one. And I don't see how I could have helped seeing anybody who passed, as I'm right opposite the door and watching all the time. Who did you think it was? Why were you frightened?"

"Oh, I don't know. I wasn't exactly frightened, but—oh, I was going to ask whether any friends of Mr. Silchester's ever meet him here?"

"Not that I know of." She chattered on, but said nothing else of interest to Rose, who tried to listen, but found herself falling into a sort of numb stupor in which she seemed to hear her companion's voice quite faintly.

After a few minutes Rose got up quickly, and muttering a hasty apology to the girl about neglecting her patient, left the room and hurried towards the stairs. She was possessed by a great dread that something had happened to the sick man, and, as she ran upstairs, her knees trembled, and she reproached herself violently for having consented to leave him even for the short time she had done. Of course these feelings were the result of her fancy that she had seen Mr. Silchester pass through the hall. But yet she was so far from really believing that the sight had been a reality that when she drew near the room where she had left the exiled king, and saw the door gently open, she turned sick with a horrible surprise, and half stumbling against the wall waited, almost in a crouching attitude, for the appearance of the man she dreaded. She could almost have cried, "Quick! Make haste!" so great was her impatience, so long did the interval seem between her first sight

of the moving door and the approach of the person behind it.

As she expected, as she *knew*, it was Mr. Silchester.

He came out almost without a sound, and it seemed to Rose's wide eyes, that there was a new expression on his enigmatical face. She caught sight at once of something he held in his left hand, and gazed upon it with a fascinated stare of interest so keen that she felt the one deepest need of her soul was to know what was inside it. He stopped short at sight of her, and at the same moment she sprang forward. He was too quick for her. At the moment when her outstretched hand would have touched his mysterious burden, with a dexterous movement he put it behind his back. As he did so, Rose, whose eyes followed it closely, saw that the parcel looked like a small bundle of coarse sacking. Mr. Silchester seized both her hands in his right so nimbly that she was for the moment cowed by a sense of utter powerlessness. He laughed softly, and said not at all unkindly :

"Oh, Mother Eve, what have you not to answer for? Mrs. Revel, curiosity is a bad quality for such work as you have to do!"

"Let me go! I want to go in—to my patient!" said Rose hoarsely, her deep voice ringing through the corridor.

"Certainly, certainly. Your patient should be your

first care. Good-bye, Mrs. Revel; your method of nursing suits me admirably. I shall use your services again."

She did not answer. Her tongue seemed paralyzed with horror. She stood immovable for a moment, saw Mr. Silchester enter the adjoining room,—the one he had used, and watched for his reappearance with a dull mind.

She was startled into movement by a faint, stifled cry from her patient's room. Shuddering, cold, almost incapable of dragging her leaden limbs along, she turned to the door. For the cry was one of agony.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR AT FAULT.

ROSE was not a coward ; but she felt that she would have given ten years of her life not to have to enter that sick room alone. There was no help for it ; the faint, wailing cry of her unhappy patient had not died away when, cold and horror-struck, not daring to define her fears, she opened the door and crossed the room to his bedside.

She was too late ; she knew that as soon as her reluctant eyes met those of the unlucky exile. He was alive, but there was no hope. Already his eyes seemed to be growing glassy, he drew breath with difficulty, and the black shadow of death was on his face. Rose suppressed a cry.

"What has he done to you ?" she cried hoarsely.

The sick man gasped for a breath and writhed as he lay.

"I don't know," said he in a strangled voice. "I was asleep, and I awoke in pain. Now—the pain—is less—my limbs feel dead—my throat swells—I am dying——"

Rose fled across the room to the fireplace, and placing her finger on the button of the electric bell, held it there while the dying man, with more and more difficulty, went on speaking.

"Why ring? Nothing can be done—I feel it—I do not care. You only can give me comfort," he continued in a breaking voice. "My boy——"

He broke down altogether on the whispered word. Rose, still with her finger on the bell, answered him in a low, hoarse voice, that thrilled with passionate pity.

"Don't fear, don't doubt me. If your child is alive, I will find him, save him, at the risk of my own life; I swear it, I swear it."

The sick man had struggled up to his elbow, and was looking at Rose with eyes in which the light of life was burning faint and dim.

"I believe you," he whispered. "I am satisfied."

At that moment Rose heard the distant sound of footsteps coming quickly towards the room. She opened the door, and told the approaching chambermaid to send at once for a doctor, and to ask either the manager or his wife to come upstairs without delay. In less than two minutes, during which time the sick man had refused to take an emetic which Rose prepared, and had been seized with sickness and a kind of convulsion, breathing at the same time with

ever-increasing difficulty, there was a light tap at the door, and, without waiting for permission, the manager of the hotel came in.

Mr. Branson was a man under forty years of age, with a shrewd, honest face. Rose felt that she could trust him.

"This gentleman," she said at once, in a low voice, "has been poisoned."

He glanced at her with suspicion.

"Wrong medicine?" he asked sharply.

"No. I was downstairs: I had left him asleep. Coming up, I found a man leaving this room. It was Mr. Silchester."

"Mr. Silchester! Oh, impossible! I saw him off myself this morning."

"He has returned then."

The manager looked more than incredulous.

"I will make inquiries," said he coldly. "But in any case Mr. Silchester can have had nothing to do with the poisoning of this gentleman. Here is the doctor."

To Rose's great annoyance and disappointment, it was the same who had attended her patient previously. As she expected, he was quite at a loss. He looked at the sick man, and felt his pulse, which was feeble and irregular. It was Rose who made the next discovery.

"His limbs are swollen, sir; look at that arm. And he is cold and clammy. Doesn't that point to poison? The question is only:—What poison?"

But the doctor did not know. After hearing a full account of the symptoms already observed by the nurse, the only suggestions he could make were, "Arsenic" and "An emetic." Rose said she had wished to administer the latter, but the patient had refused to allow it. Both men were now, she felt, looking at her with suspicion. There was a silence, none of the three knowing what to do or to say, which was broken by the sick man. He was in pain evidently, but he had been watching and listening, and he now spoke in a peremptory tone, though his voice was faint and weak.

"Nurse Revel," said he, "come here."

Rose obeyed; and the dying man laid his right hand, which was cold and clammy, on her arm.

"You know," said he slowly, and with many pauses for breath, "who has done this, and—though you can never—bring him to—justice—you are now warned. I give to you—these gentlemen are witnesses—my cloak, it is in there," and he pointed to the wardrobe, "and what money I have about me, and everything else of mine that is found in this room. All upon trust—remember our compact, my trust."

He sank back, exhausted, supported in her arms,

and with a moan of pain, and a painful struggle for his failing breath, fell sideways upon her shoulder. They thought it was all over, but he regained enough strength to raise his head and whisper huskily in her ear, "My boy, my child!"

One more long, piteous, unwilling fight for breath, and his lifeless head fell heavily down again, while Rose was still murmuring, in a deep, sweet voice of consolation:—

"I will find your boy, if he is to be found; I will be sister, mother, guardian to him, as long as he needs it; I will shrink from nothing in his service, for the sake of my bond with you. I swear."

The last words trembled on her lips, for she knew that the ears of the unhappy exile were deaf for ever.

Not a sound had come from the two spectators of this pitiful scene. They did not move until the nurse, slowly and reverently, laid the body down on the bed. Then the doctor came forward and touched the dead man.

"Dead!" he said. "Under very mysterious circumstances. The unfortunate gentleman seemed to intimate," he continued, turning to Rose with new deference and some nervous hesitation, "that you, madam, could give some explanation."

Rose gave no answer, and the doctor did not press it. For there was a dignity in her tall, erect figure,

an expression of passionate solemnity in her white face, in her great black eyes, which commanded the deepest respect, and seemed to change the whole type of her black-browed countenance from mere haughtiness to majesty.

For she felt the great responsibility, the certain danger of the task she had taken upon herself, the oath she had, with all the earnestness of which she was capable, sworn into the ears of a dying man.

"There must be an inquest," said the manager shortly, breaking the silence with annoyance in his tone. "Then you will have to give evidence, and we may get at something."

"I should like to make a statement to you presently, sir," said Rose, turning to him. "I don't know that I can make the affair seem less mysterious, but I can at least explain the words he used."

"When you please, madam," said the manager. Then, turning, he said, "Have you been able to come to any conclusion, doctor, concerning the cause of death?"

"Yes," answered the other decidedly. He had been examining, first the body of the dead man, and then the array of bottles on the little table beside the bed. "I should think it was undoubtedly suicide—temporary insanity, no doubt."

Rose shot at him a glance of contempt from her

black eyes. The manager also looked rather sceptical.

"You'll keep this as quiet as you can, doctor, won't you? For my sake," said he. "I don't want these circumstances known all over the town; it would injure me badly. I'll have the body taken away from the hotel for the inquest, and if you can prove it's suicide, so much the better. That's bad enough, but it's better than a mystery."

Still, a mystery the occurrence remained, there was no denying that; and this conviction was impressed very plainly on the faces of all three, as they stood looking at the silent figure on the bed by the light of the flaring gas, and of a pair of candles which the doctor had brought close to the bed to help him in his inspection. Gradually it was borne in upon the minds of the two men, either by the nurse's appearance and manner or by force of reason, that she was certainly innocent of any share in the stranger's death. They began to gaze in her face with less and less of suspicion and with more and more of puzzled inquiry, and a hope that she might hold a key to this mystery.

"Well, doctor, there is no more for you to do here, unhappily," said the manager at last. "I will shut up this room, take away the key, and we'll talk this over downstairs, when we've pulled ourselves together after the first shock of it."

The doctor assented readily enough. He was conscious of not having appeared to advantage from beginning to end of this affair, and his desire to avoid undue publicity was to the full as strong as his companion's. Rose lingered behind the two men, as they left the room, to perform certain reverent offices for the dead man. When she rejoined them in the corridor, the doctor went on a few steps towards the staircase, while the manager locked the door of the room. Rose seized the opportunity of speaking to him rapidly, in a low voice.

"You don't believe Mr. Silchester had a hand in it? Come into his room. He went in there when he left me outside this door."

"I tell you," answered the manager quickly, "that he left this morning, and hasn't returned. He left some luggage in the dressing-room, as he often does, and took away the key. I myself found the door locked when I came upstairs this afternoon after he was gone."

However, because the nurse was persistent, Mr. Branson went into the room Mr. Silchester had used during his stay, and crossed to the dressing-room door. There he uttered an exclamation of surprise: for the door was unfastened, and the key was in the lock.

"Now, do you see there is something in what I say?" asked Rose, excited and triumphant.

"I see there may be," answered the manager cautiously. He had drawn open the door and entered the dressing-room.

There was no trace of any luggage, unless an end of thin coarse string and a tiny shred of sacking had been part of it. Rose picked up both these trifles carefully, and they left the room together without further comment. But Mr. Branson locked the door of this room also and took away the key. The doctor, waiting in the corridor and looking nervous, asked if they had made any discoveries.

"Nothing of any consequence," said the manager, whose opinion of the doctor's sagacity was not much higher than Rose's.

In consequence of this impression, Mr. Branson, when they all entered his private room downstairs, gave the doctor, instead of his confidence, a stiff glass of whisky and water. Rose stood silently by while the two men talked in low tones. She gathered that they were consulting as to the best means, not of solving the mystery, but of hushing it up. In this discussion she took no part. And it was not until the doctor had finished his whisky and water, shaken hands, and left to go home, that she again spoke.

"Now that fool is gone," she began contemptuously, "I can tell you all I know."

Mr. Branson gave a short laugh.

"I had no idea the case was a serious one," said he regretfully, "or I should have sent for a better man. As it was, I sent for the nearest."

"You need not reproach yourself," Rose said, in a gravely reassuring tone; "the greatest physician in the world could have done very little better, I firmly believe. You shall judge for yourself."

Then, seeing that, for all reasons, the manager was a person in whom she could confide, she related to him in full detail all the circumstances of her coming: her mistake at the outset, her conversations with the sick man and with Mr. Silchester, her dismissal, under orders, of the woman sent as nurse, the strange compact which the sick man had forced upon her, his immovable despondency, and finally her meeting with Mr. Silchester outside the door of the sick room, just as she heard the dying man's cry.

Mr. Branson put by no means so much faith in the dead man's story as Rose herself had been tempted to do. Mr. Silchester had been a pretty constant visitor to the hotel, sometimes for a day or two, more often for a few hours only. He had given his London address, and Mr. Branson, going to his office, brought back a book in which he had entered it—No.—Lincoln's Inn Fields. There had never been anything in the least suspicious in Mr. Silchester's manner or movements.

"And I can tell you," continued the manager, "that in this business one soon gets to spot a shady character. I am afraid I rather incline, myself, to put the boot on the other leg, and to think that the unfortunate gentleman who has just died upstairs had some very good reason for getting out of the world his own way, instead of waiting for his fate to be settled by the law."

Rose Revel broke in with vehemence and decision.

"I will not believe it, I cannot believe it! Indeed," she went on more calmly, "I can show you some proof of his rank. No one but a very great personage could afford to wear such a cloak as his, and there is a crown or coronet on his pocket-books, purses, everything."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer, and it takes more than stamped coronets to make a king. The unfortunate man may have been a colossal swindler, and Mr. Silchester may have been the solicitor (I believe he is a solicitor) who was put on his track. In any case my advice to you is this: communicate with the police. If the dead man's story is true," and Mr. Branson almost shrugged his shoulders, "they may help you to find the child. If it is false, they will find out that for you without any difficulty. In the meantime you shall have the money and the rest of the things he gave you in my presence; and if

the police should have to request you to restore them to previous owners, you won't blame me."

Even the account of the stranger's compact with Rose, sealed by a gift of five hundred pounds, did not satisfy Mr. Branson.

"That he was very anxious to secure your services I can see," he admitted. "But I think that perhaps, if he had lived a little longer, you might have found that he had not told you the real reason why he wanted them. If he was a swindler, for instance, he may have wanted you to help him to escape from justice."

Rose made no answer to this suggestion, but she remained entirely unconvinced. At her request, Mr. Branson made inquiries of the waiters and servants, with a view to learning whether Mr. Silchester had been seen to enter the hotel that evening, as she described. No one had seen him. Rose pointed out that this was not conclusive, as the hotel was not very full, and at the time she was having tea with the young lady in charge of the office most of the visitors were at dinner. On the other hand, this young lady declared that, as soon as the nurse left her, she resumed her place at the office desk, and could not have failed to see Mr. Silchester, if he had passed out, especially as, Miss Revel having declared she saw him go by, she might say she was on the watch for

him. Rose, however, elicited from Mr. Branson the fact that there was another staircase, used by the servants, which was but little frequented in the early part of the evening. She decided in her own mind that it was by this means that Mr. Silchester had made his escape out of the hotel, after what she did not hesitate to call the murder of her patient.

When Rose left the manager, both were more strongly convinced than before of the truth of their own particular view of the case. She watched all night by the dead man, so much absorbed by her thoughts and speculations that it was not until the morning that it occurred to her to find out the value of the present the sick man had made her on his death bed. In the purse and the pocket-book she found a sum of nearly fifteen hundred pounds in gold and notes. She next examined the fur cloak. Taking it down from the peg on which it hung, the first thing she remarked was its enormous weight. She supposed that it was only used for traveling, as a strong man would have found it difficult to walk far under such a burden. It was made of very fine dark blue cloth, and the rich color and softness of the sable-tails with which it was lined struck her even more than upon her first sight of the cloak. She next felt in the pockets of the velveteen coat, in which she had, by the sick man's wish, found his purse ;

but they contained nothing more of any consequence, except two small keys which proved to belong to his portmanteau and dressing-bag.

Both these she opened, examining their contents carefully. Both were fitted up handsomely with gold or silver-gilt. In the dressing-bag Rose found a bundle of private papers and letters. She hesitated, with these in her hand. The dead man had apparently put in her such boundless confidence that she felt she was free to examine them if she chose; on the other hand, Mr. Branson's arguments had had so little effect upon her that she did not need to try to discover proofs of the truth of the dead man's story. She therefore put the papers back into the bag, and relocked it. In the portmanteau she found, besides clothes, a book or two and a small Russia leather writing-case, with two securely fastened locks. She put back everything as she found it, and locked the portmanteau as she had done the bag. She had done everything reverently, in the presence of the dead man, taking the gift he had made her of these possessions as a trust for the benefit of his son, in whose existence she believed as firmly as in her power to save him from his father's enemies. For her enthusiasm had caught light, and it blinded her to the dangers and difficulties which might lie in the way of her wild quest. Then, after once more

solemnly gazing on the face of the dead man, and forming with her lips words expressive of her loyalty to his wishes, as if in the belief that that would comfort him, she crept out of the room, locking the door behind her.

Rose went first to the manager's office, and informed Mr. Branson that she was going to follow his advice and consult the police. He was relieved to hear this, but did not tell her that, if she had been an hour later in coming to this decision, he should have taken the step upon himself. He told her where the chief police station was, and offered to get her a cab but she said she preferred to walk, it would do her good ; and, after a nominal breakfast, she started on her errand. Mr. Branson, whose confidence in his fellow-creatures had been much impaired by the rude shocks of experience, gave directions to one of the waiters, who had been employed incidentally as an amateur detective upon occasion, to follow and watch her movements at a discreet distance.

This precaution was quite uncalled for. Rose Revel, although she could pursue a given object with a steadiness and pertinacity which sometimes approached perilously near to unscrupulousness, was an honest and straightforward woman in the main, only cunning when she found herself unequally pitted against the cunning, and incapable of deceiving any person whom

she believed to be worthy of confidence. These not uncommon characteristics of the stronger sort of women were in Rose accompanied by a very feminine tenderness of heart, which had so far found its chief outlet in her passionate love for her sister.

It happened, however, that her actions on this particular morning were mysterious enough to afford an apparent justification of Mr. Branson's caution.

On leaving the hotel, Rose turned to the left, on her way to the chief police station. She had not gone far when her attention was attracted by the sight of a figure in front of her which she recognized as that of the tall, fair young man whom she suspected of having mysterious communication with Mr. Silchester. He was walking at a leisurely pace, with his head well back as before, his soft, wide-brimmed hat tilted slightly on one side, his caped cloak streaming and flapping in the wind. Rose instantly decided that she would follow him. Down Parker street he went, she after him; through the market, and with many a turning towards the docks, he always at the same sauntering pace, she always cautious and not too close behind. An unsavory neighborhood, this to which he was leading the way, full of uninviting lodging-houses and the cheapest sort of eating-houses; not at all the kind of place where a gentleman of the type of the fastidious-looking

stranger would be expected to take his pleasure. He was, indeed, made the subject of some uncomplimentary comment of the "chaffing" sort, but he bore it with such stolid imperturbability as to raise the question whether he was not too much self-absorbed even to hear it. Rose had long since decided that it was business which brought him to this neighborhood, and the conviction was strengthened by the shrill cry of one small boy to another :—

"'Ere's the madman, Sam."

This remark proved to her that this was not his first visit.

At the door of one of the more respectable-looking of the shabby lodging-houses he stopped, and, admitting himself by a latch-key, disappeared at once from Rose Revel's eyes. She passed the house quickly, and entering one of the poor eating-houses on the opposite side of the street, sat down at a table from which she could watch the door by which the young man had passed in. There were few people in the dingy room ; a couple of sailors, making a late breakfast, who subdued their talk at sight of the nurse's uniform ; a quiet man dozing over a newspaper at the far end ; that was all. Rose asked for a roll and butter, and, eating as slowly as she could, watched until, nearly half an hour later, the poetical-looking gentleman came out again. She got a good

view of him, noted the smug expression of his face and the pompous air with which he walked. Then, only waiting long enough to give him time to turn the corner of the street, she paid for her roll and went out.

Rose had conceived the idea that she might find the missing child, whom she firmly believed to be alive, in this house. If it really was the intention of Mr. Silchester and his apparent confederate to take the young prince to America, was not this low lodging-house, close to the docks, a likely place for them to keep him in hiding until they found a fitting time for carrying out their intention?

With excitement which she found it hard to subdue to the point of concealment, Rose rang the bell, and listened to the slow footsteps of a slipshod woman who came along the passage to open the door.

CHAPTER VII.

MISSING :—A YOUNG PRINCE.

FOR the first time, as Rose Revel stood at the door of the Liverpool lodging-house, her belief in the strange story told by her late patient wavered. If it were true, the young child of whom she was in search was lawfully King of Sergania ; and surely the "divinity" which "doth hedge a king" would keep even the infant monarch of a tenth-rate state from such degrading surroundings as these.

So Rose thought, beginning to feel that she was on a wild-goose chase ; and it was with evident diffidence that she addressed the woman who opened the door, substituting a different question for that which she had prepared about the child.

"There is a gentleman stopping here on the first-floor," she hazarded, feeling sure that the fastidious-looking stranger would be content with nothing less than the best accommodation the poor place afforded, and speaking with more simplicity of manner than was natural to her, "a very distinguished-looking gentleman who goes about in a cloak and eye-glasses. I have a message for him. Is he in?"

The woman, a dark-haired native of Lancashire, who wore the orthodox shawl no longer round her head but round her shoulders, gazed at the nurse with shrewd curiosity.

"What's his name?" she asked, and Rose perceived at once that the woman herself did not know the name of her lodger, and also that she regarded him with curiosity and suspicion.

"Mr. Morton," answered Rose, therefore, with much promptitude.

The woman opened the door a little further, as if still in some doubt.

"He don't expect any visitors, as I knows," she said dubiously. "He's out mostly. He may be out now, for all I know."

"Can I go up and see?"

"Ay. But you must take the blame yourself if he don't want you."

Rose passed her, and began to ascend the narrow staircase.

"Stop!" cried the mistress of the house suddenly; and, running after the visitor, she detained her with a strong hand. "I'd better go up first, maybe," she added, as she rushed past Rose.

It had occurred to the landlady that the meeting between her lodger and the visitor might not be without interest. So she knocked at the door of the front

room on the first-floor, and, receiving no answer, put her head in. She withdrew it again immediately, and shut the door, saying in a low voice, "No, he ain't in."

Rose noticed the lowering of the voice, and her curiosity was instantly roused. There was someone in the room, she was sure. All her belief in the exile's story instantly returned.

"I can leave my message with the boy," she hazarded quickly.

The landlady looked at her with a glance which seemed to Rose to be full of suspicion.

"What boy?" she asked sharply. "There's no boy here. And I should just like to know who you are, coming spying about the place."

"I'm looking for a child who has been carried away from his guardians," said Rose boldly, "and I'm sure you'd rather I should come by myself than that I should bring a policeman with me to search the house. We had information that the boy was likely to be found here, and I was sent to find out if this was the case."

"There's no child here," said the woman sullenly and suspiciously.

"Who's that in the room, then?"

"A gentleman that came with Mr. Morton."

"May I see him?"

The woman hesitated, looking at the nurse out of the corners of her eyes with a puzzled expression.

"You can if you like, if you won't go near him or disturb him. He's asleep—or half asleep, as he has been nearly ever since he came."

"When was that?" asked Rose.

"Two days ago."

The woman had her fingers again upon the handle of the door. It was her visitor's turn to hesitate. For a new idea had come into Rose's mind, which made her draw back, doubting whether she was ready for what might be a startling interview.

"*He* won't hurt you!" said the landlady in a contemptuous tone. "If he's a bit moony, it's only in the soft and silly way; and the way they keep those rooms, like a hothouse and smelling of scents fit to knock you down, is enough to do it. A strapping woman like you has more need to be afraid of the heat than of him."

Rose had noticed how the hot air, heavy and sickly with perfumes strange to her, had rushed out through the door as soon as it was opened.

"I'm not afraid," she said, "I'll go in."

The landlady opened the door and stood by it curiously, as Rose entered. She thought the visitor rather a mysterious person, and did not believe a word of her story about the lost child.

Rose looked eagerly towards the fireplace, where, seated in an armchair and cowering over the fire, was a young man, who turned his head slightly in her direction, without looking at her.

"Shut the door, please," said he, in a complaining voice, with a marked German accent.

Rose stopped short, her foreboding growing stronger. Could this miserable-looking lad, cowering over the fire like a starved animal, be the king's son, whom she had promised to care for and protect? She remembered, in a flash of new comprehension, as she stood there, that the sick man had never mentioned the age of his son, that it was her imagination which had supplied all details and pictured a little fair-haired, delicate child, and not a sickly young man.

The door still stood open, the landlady still clinging to the handle. The young man turned peevishly.

"Will you have the goodness to shut the door?" he said.

And as he spoke he caught sight of the tall figure in black in the middle of the room. He rose at once, looking at her with shy inquiry.

"You come to see me, Madam, or Mr. Keith?" he asked.

The name "Keith" brought a revelation to Rose, who remembered every word the dying king had

spoken about the Scotch tutor whose loyalty had seemed to his master stronger than his intellect.

"Mr. Donald Keith?" she said inquiringly.

"Yes," answered the young man. "He will not be returned till this afternoon."

All this time Rose Revel's great burning black eyes were fixed steadily on the pale face before her, as she tried to reconcile herself to the fact which was forcing itself upon her mind more and more strongly. There was a pause, during which she took in every detail: tall, thin figure, apparently grown beyond its strength, narrow chested and stooping; very fair, pale skin, unhealthy and leaden looking; irregular features, lack-lustre blue eyes; hair and eyebrows so light that there was more of silver than of gold in it; long, thin, well-shaped hands; no hair on the face. One redeeming trait was all Rose saw:—the young fellow's eyes were full of gentleness, and his manner, though rather peevish, did not contradict this impression.

Rose turned to the landlady.

"It is all right, thank you," said she. "I will tell this gentleman my message."

With great reluctance the woman retreated.

Then Rose turned again to the gentleman, who was watching her movements, listening to her deep voice, with wonder and interest. As soon as the door was shut, and the landlady's unwilling steps were heard

going downstairs, Rose drew from under her long cloak a beautiful watch, with chain and seals, which she had found under the dead man's pillow, and moving a few steps nearer to the young man, held it out towards him.

"Do you know this?" she asked. "And this?" She showed him the pocket-book.

He began to tremble violently, to flush a pale pink, and to look at her with side-glances of suspicion.

"They are my father's," said he hoarsely. "Do you come from him? Where is he?"

Rose did not answer. The young man sank down with one knee on the armchair from which he had risen, and by the look in his panic-stricken eyes she knew that he guessed the truth.

"I know, I know," said he, cowering down. "He said they would never rest while he lived, or I. And—he—is gone. There is only my weak life to take now."

His head fell until the chin rested on the back of the chair on which he was kneeling, he seemed lost in despair. Rose roused him with her full, rich voice. She saw that he was not so much overwhelmed with grief as with horror.

"It is true," she said, "that your father is dead. I was with him when he died. He entrusted me with the task of finding you out, and——" She stopped. It

seemed absurd to tell this great over-grown lad, sickly as he was, the exact terms of the trust confided to her. So she finished with—"And he gave me a letter which I am to deliver myself to one of his executors, whose address he gave me."

"Yes. Well?"

This limp, apathetic creature irritated Rose beyond endurance. He ought to have been distracted with grief, struggling for self-control, full of eager, passionate questionings; but there he knelt, feeble, nerveless, without the sense or the courage even to make inquiries about the manner of his father's death, overwhelmed by a numb horror which in a stronger man would have been terrible to see. Rose scarcely knew how to go on. At last she said:—

"When he lost you in London, he came here to Liverpool, believing that you had been taken to America. At the North-Western Hotel he died, under mysterious circumstances, which I cannot explain, but——"

"Sh——" whispered the young fellow, with a shiver. "It isn't safe to talk about it. You had better go away. And yet——"

He suddenly raised his head, and looked at her with a yearning expression, like that of a child in pain, who mutely asks its nurse, with innocent eyes, for the alleviation she cannot give. Rose was moved by the

look, and coming forward quickly, with a thrill as she remembered that this poor, helpless lad was now under her care, she laid her hand on his fair hair, and said in a kind tone :

"Who are you afraid of? Tell me. You may trust me, as your father did."

The young fellow looked up in her face, half in fear, half in reverent, timid respect.

"I am not afraid," he whispered. "At least, I am only afraid when Donald is away."

"Was it he who brought you from London?" she asked softly.

"Yes."

"Ah!" escaped sharply from her lips.

He looked at her with instant suspicion.

"How was that?" she asked, controlling herself.

She had to repeat the question in her gentlest tones, caressing his hair, before he answered. The touch of her hand seemed to have a soothing, mesmeric effect upon him, so that, though still half unwilling, he replied, fully.

"My father had gone out; I was alone. Suddenly Donald came in, my old tutor, whom we had left in Sergania. He had followed us, and seen my father, and he came to tell me that our enemies had followed us, that we must escape. I with him, my father alone. Donald brought me to this town, and wished to take

me away by sea. But I refused. I said I would wait for my father. And now——"

He covered his face with his hands, quite broken down. Rose, wondering at his fatuous confidence, began to doubt whether his mind was perfectly balanced. She had no doubt whatever that the apparently simple-minded Donald Keith was in the pay of a power hostile to the exiled king, and that he had acted in concert with the mysterious Mr. Silchester.

"Now," she said, impressively, stooping so that his wandering eyes met hers, "don't you begin to see that you have been deceived?"

Again he fell to trembling violently, and shook his head, as if obstinately refusing to entertain a doubt of his friend.

"No, no, no," he said in a weak voice. "Don't make me doubt Donald. He has been my friend, my companion, for eight years. I *must* trust him. Who else could I trust?"

The poor lad had given her, in those words, the key of his nature. He must have some one to trust, to lean upon.

"Trust in yourself," said Rose robustly. "I thought that was the first lesson taught to all kings' sons."

He shook his head, but looked at the resolute face of his visitor with ever-increasing awe and admiration.

"I am not like you," he said humbly. "My father would have liked to have a daughter or a son like you. I was a disappointment."

"He always spoke of you with the most devoted affection. He thought of nothing, of no one else."

"Yes, I know that. But he was disappointed with me for all that. I saw it in his eyes when he looked at me, and I was afraid of him. It was Donald I loved."

His tone grew affectionate at once.

"But you would like to see your father's face for the last time?"

After a pause he said "Yes" reluctantly, with a shiver.

Rose drew herself up briskly.

"Then you must make haste, or it will be too late. You must go with me now, at once, to the hotel, for I do not know how soon they may take him away."

But Siegfried hung back, looking horribly frightened.

"Not now, not now. I cannot go out on a cold day like this; it would kill me! Donald allows me *never* to go out when it is cold. Wait, wait till he come. Hear what he say."

His English, which had been perfectly correct up to that moment, although he spoke slowly, suffered in his excitement. Rose was very quiet, but she insisted,

"I cannot afford the time to wait," she said, "nor can you. Your father, as you will hear from witnesses at the hotel, put great confidence in me, and charged me to take care of you."

"Donald will do that," faltered the young man.

"Well, we shall see what he says. In the meantime you have now to come with me."

He was terribly afraid of her, now that she had once used that firm tone of command to him. He buttoned himself tightly up in a long fur-lined cloak with rueful glances through the window, fastened a huge silk handkerchief two or three times round his throat, drew one fold of it up over his mouth, put on two pair of gloves, and then, taking up his hat, opened the door very reluctantly for his imperious visitor. The landlady met them in the passage and watched them out with evident suspicion.

"You are not going to make me walk! I cannot walk!" murmured poor Siegfried plaintively.

Rose shot an impatient glance at him. What was she to do with this impossible creature?

"We can get a cab at the corner of the next street but one," she said, in a tone so cold that her companion ventured no further remark, but dragged himself along beside her, as if by a painful and unaccustomed effort.

When they got into the cab, he sank back into a

corner as if quite exhausted, and Rose, shooting one disdainful look at him under her thick black eyelashes, left him to his own thoughts. At the hotel, which they reached in a few minutes, she left Siegfried waiting inside the cab while she went in to speak to the manager, whose amazement deepened into enthusiastic admiration as she related to him the details of her capture.

"It will be a splendid thing for you," he said, when she had finished. "This gentleman king—if you call him king, was evidently in the mood to be generous, and I expect you'll find that in this letter to his executor he has given directions for you to be handsomely provided for."

"Well," said Rose energetically, "no provision would be too handsome for the person who is condemned to drag about this miserable creature whom I've left in the cab."

Mr. Branson was much amused, and he went out himself to escort indoors the young gentleman so unkindly described. Prince Siegfried declined to enter the hotel at all until he was assured that he would be taken straight to a room which was thoroughly well warmed. In fulfilment of this promise, the manager took him to the room behind his office, where the young man instantly drew a chair close up to the fire, and held his thin white hands out towards the blaze,

"In rapid consumption?" suggested Mr. Branson by the motions of his lips to Rose, who shook her head scornfully.

It was only by a desperate effort that she made voice and manner kind as she suggested to him, after watching the young prince for a few minutes as he feebly rubbed his hands before the fire, that he should now come upstairs and see his father's face for the last time. Siegfried's pale cheeks and lips seemed to grow grey at the suggestion, but he had not spirit enough to raise the faintest objection; drawing himself slowly and as if with difficulty out of his chair, he proceeded to follow her with an expression of mingled terror and resignation. They went up in the lift, of course; at sight of the stairs the prince had stopped short as if on the point of giving up the expedition. Mr. Branson accompanied them, and knocked at the door of the dead man's room, where his wife herself had been keeping watch. She unlocked the door, admitted them, and went downstairs to take her husband's place.

Prince Siegfried shook from head to foot as they uncovered his father's face for him. He only gave one glance at it, and then withdrew, shivering more than ever, to the foot of the bed, where he threw himself upon his knees, and buried his head in his hands. Rose scarcely noticed him, her attention having been

taken up with two things : first, the particularly frigid manner in which Mrs. Branson had drawn herself up and averted her head in passing her ; secondly, the presence in the death-chamber of Mr. Silchester, who stood, in an attitude of respectful grief, away from the bed, watching Prince Siegfried with vigilant eyes. Rose had no difficulty in connecting these two circumstances ; she was certain that Mr. Silchester, taking advantage of the bad character he believed her to have, had been careful to instil the suspicion that she herself had wheedled the dying man into making her handsome presents, and had then killed him in order that she might remain in undisturbed possession of them. Her entrance with Siegfried had evidently astonished him. His grey eyes traveled from her to the prince and back again for a few moments, and then he crossed the room with soft, gliding steps to her side.

"How is this ?" he asked, with his usual fixed, courteous smile. "I did not know that you were acquainted with the unfortunate gentleman's son ? I can see by the likeness that he is his son."

"I was not, until this morning," answered Rose very coldly. "As I then considered it to my interest to find him out, I found him out—as you see."

Mr. Silchester looked at her with honest admiration.

"To your interest?" he echoed softly. "Oh, no, no, you do yourself injustice."

"Not at all," answered Rose, lifting her black eyes to his face. "His father left this young—man," she shot a glance at the kneeling prince which was more contemptuous than she knew, "in my care. He is in delicate health, I understand, and wants good nursing. He has given me a letter to one of his executors—" and Rose produced the sealed note, which she handed to Mr. Silchester for him to assure himself that the address on the envelope was really in the handwriting of the dead man—"and I have no doubt that in it he has carried out the intention he expressed of making it worth my while."

"No doubt," assented Mr. Silchester with great suavity. "And I am quite sure, Mrs. Revel, that it would be impossible for the young man to be in better hands than yours. To judge by his looks, poor fellow," he went on in a tone so low that it was impossible for any one but Rose to hear, "I should say he has not many weeks to live; but I am happy to think that those few weeks will be rendered less gloomy by your kind care."

Rose bowed her head; she felt that she was almost choking with the desire to brand this man with the name of murderer; but recognizing the fact that her only chance of fulfilling the dead man's trust was by

affected submission to him, she controlled herself by severe efforts, and assumed an attitude of extreme humility towards him.

Mr. Silchester still kept up his affectation of entire ignorance of the name and rank of Siegfried and his late father. It was in the character of a sympathetic stranger that he presently stepped forward, and, laying a hand very gently on the shoulder of the kneeling lad, exhorted him to be calm and patient in his sorrow, using the conventional platitudes of consolation in such a soft voice, with such a kindly manner, that they seemed from his lips to acquire new meaning. Siegfried, who appeared to be a mere puppet in the hands of whoever chose to lead him, and to be entirely incapable of exercising a will of his own, got up meekly and allowed his new friend to lead him from the room. Mr. Branson and Rose followed. As they passed out together, Rose found an opportunity to whisper to the manager:—

"Your wife suspects *me*. I am sure of it. It is his doing."

And she glanced at Mr. Silchester.

"Very likely, if your own suspicions are correct," was all he said.

Mr. Branson did not know what to make of the whole business, but he was such a shrewd man that, the more he considered it, the more he felt inclined to believe in the nurse's good faith.

Just as Siegfried and Mr. Silchester reached the ground-floor of the hotel, a gentleman, who had been making some inquiries at the office, turned and uttered a loud cry. Then he affected to start back two or three steps, overcome by surprise and joy, and rushing forward, enveloped Siegfried in the folds of his heavy cloak.

"My heart, my soul, my friend!" exclaimed the gentleman, whom Rose at once recognized as Donald Keith. "Found, found! I had begun to fear you were lost to me again, for I went to the rooms where I had left you, and found that you had been snared away from me by the arts of——"

"His present guardian," broke in Rose's deep voice, which caused the ecstatic young gentleman a more genuine start than the first, "to whom you will please give up your own claims—for the present, at any rate."

"And who, pray, are you, madam, that you dare to attempt to come between two souls which call aloud to each other?" asked Donald in a sentimental tone, but with the dogged obstinacy of his nation peeping out through his affected manner.

Rose felt that the tutor had made up his mind to retain his hold upon his pupil, and that the prince himself inclined, whether from habit or affection, she did not yet know, towards his old companion. Luck-

ily for Rose, a most unexpected supporter came to her rescue.

Raising his hat, and affecting to meet Donald Keith for the first time, Mr. Silchester stepped forward and courteously addressed him.

"I am sure that I have the pleasure of speaking to some dear friend of this young gentleman's?" he began.

Donald Keith followed this lead, and answered as if to a stranger. But he was not as good an actor as the older man, and shrewd Rose detected the deference of a disciple, and even some uneasiness, under his assumption of injured haughtiness.

"I am his tutor, sir, and have been for years his dearest friend. He has now lost his father——"

"How do you know that?" interrupted the deep voice of Rose.

Donald was clearly disconcerted, and he instinctively glanced at his master for assistance. But he had made an error in his reckoning. Mr. Silchester spoke in a low voice, but with a firmness there was no mistaking.

"You have been a very good tutor and a loyal friend, I have no doubt, sir, but you have perhaps not heard that the father of this young *gentleman* (I have not yet learnt his name) left his son in the care of this lady, who is a certified nurse. I think, therefore, you will not dispute that she is within her rights."

The young Scotchman's face fell; there was no mistaking the fact that he was horribly disappointed,

"But I have made sacrifices to follow him to England! Considerable pecuniary sacrifices!" he stammered mournfully.

Rose laughed; Mr. Silchester looked annoyed.

"On your own responsibility, I suppose?" said the latter suavely.

"Yes," muttered the unfortunate young man.

"I am afraid, then, your case is weak. Mrs. Revel, I suppose you intend to accompany the young gentleman direct to his father's executor, to whom you have the letter you showed me?"

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Rose, bewildered by the rapid manner in which the strange and unwelcome tie was being strengthened.

There is a train to London at 2.50. I think you have just time to catch it," continued Mr. Silchester, looking at his watch. "I will send upstairs for your luggage, and see you off myself."

There was no possibility of dissent or delay, even if Rose had wished for either. Silchester's will drew that of less decided mortals to itself with magnetic force. In less than a quarter of an hour Rose had shaken hands with Mr. Branson, the manager, received a cold bend of the head from his wife, and a glance of horror from her enthusiastic friend of the night

before, and found herself sitting in a railway-carriage bound for London, with the sinister face of Mr. Silchester looking in at the window, and the rueful Scotchman biting his lips a few yards behind him.

And there on the opposite seat was the creature with whose fate her own had been so suddenly and strangely linked. Awkward, ungainly, sallow of face, dull of eyes, with a woe-begone expression and reserved, shy manner, he sat huddled up and shivering in his furs, staring out helplessly at his late tutor, and looking, to Rose's disgusted eyes, scarcely sane, scarcely human. Just as the train started, Rose turned sharply, and found that Mr. Silchester was gazing upon her face with an expression of unalloyed satisfaction. She started, realizing in a moment its meaning.

He had allowed her to retain guardianship of the lad because he believed she hated him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOUND BY HER COMPACT.

IT was not until the train started, and Rose Revel found herself alone face to face with Prince Siegfried, that she realized the extraordinary position in which she was placed. Bound by her solemn promise to the dead man, to whom she had in fact sold her freedom of action, she was now the responsible guardian of a creature with the helplessness of a child and the querulousness of a middle-aged invalid.

How white he looked, how forlorn and shy! Rose's heart felt a pang of pity as she noted the hollows in his face, the leaden rings under his eyes, and utter absence of any signs of healthy vitality in face or movement. She wondered, as she considered him, how his father could have been so blind as not to see the skill with which the Scotch tutor was working for Russia in his manner of educating his pupil. Possibly Rose let her prejudice against Donald Keith carry her too far, for she ascribed to him not only the prince's helpless effeminacy, but also his sickly health. Approaching death seemed already to

have dimmed Siegfried's eyes, sapped his strength and paralyzed his will. Rose, intent on her own thoughts, bent further and further forward, determined, if human means could do it, to stop the mischief, and puzzling out in her own mind what steps she ought to take.

Suddenly Siegfried, who had been lying back with his eyes closed, opened them to meet a pair of black ones staring at him with an intensity which he mistook for ferocity. With a low exclamation he drew himself still further into his corner, and Rose, guessing that his black-browed face had frightened him, though she could not guess to what an extent, changed her place to take the seat beside him. He had closed his eyes again, but she saw that he was shuddering with terror at the thought of having her so near him.

"I'm afraid my dark face alarms you, prince," she said, using the rich tones of her deep voice with persuasive effect. "But I want you to forget it, and to remember that your father put great trust in me, and commended you to me on his death-bed."

"I know; yes, I know," murmured Siegfried hastily. "The man at the hotel told me. And indeed, madam, I believe you. You are very good, I am sure. But you are a stranger to me, and you have been the means of separating me from my friend, my

tutor, so that I am alone in the world, helpless, at your mercy; I don't know what is to become of me."

And Siegfried, who had kept his head turned away from her, broke down with sobs in his voice.

"But you will soon find out," said Rose, in an encouraging tone. "First, we will go to see this Mr. Combermere, the solicitor, whom I have a letter to. Then, we will obtain an interview with Sir Ambrose Fenning, the prime minister, who used to be an intimate friend of your father's, I understand. He will be sure to do something for you."

"Oh," said Siegfried, with the first glimmer of shrewdness he had shown, "you must not count upon that, madam. My father used to say that the government of men was the most degrading of all occupations, and that rulers, both kings and ministers, must always be approached by their bad side. Now, how will you or I be able to do that?"

"I should not try," said Rose. "I should appeal to his old friendship for your father, to his sense of justice."

"He will have neither friendship nor justice," said Siegfried, shaking his head. "My father taught me to know these men, and warned me never to make a friend of any man in a public capacity. We shall get no good from going to him."

"What do you wish for yourself, then?"

"I don't know," answered Siegfried irresolutely, "except that I should like to have Donald with me."

"Well," said Rose, after a minute's consideration, "I will try this Donald Keith by making him think you have been left without money. If he is anxious to remain with you all the same, it will prove him to be disinterested and——"

"My father would have said it would prove him to be a fool," interrupted the young prince gently. "I should not dare to try him like that, at any rate; for Donald is fond of money, I know. And if my father said I was to be under your care, that is enough. I do not understand, but I doubt not he had some good reason."

"You loved your father very dearly," said Rose in a soft voice, somewhat surprised by his calmness.

"I revered and honored him," answered the prince reluctantly. "I did not dare to love him; he was too wise, he made the world seem too black. I loved Donald."

"Was not Donald wise, then?"

"Not in the same way. But he was learned in his way. He was an occultist. He talked much to me about his soul: my father said it was because he had no mind."

"Did you believe that?"

"I did not care. My father was so anxious about

my education that all my other tutors taught, taught, taught me from morning till night. So that I was glad of Donald, who did not educate me so hard, and who used to talk on with his eyes on the ceiling, so that I did not have to try to understand."

"You must be very learned yourself, then."

"I don't know. I have been told and taught a great many things, but they buzz in my head sometimes. I think I should like to have been born a carpenter, and not have had to learn so much."

"You would rather have been a carpenter than a king?"

"Yes, one would be one's own master, and there would not be so many duties. Duties! I heard of nothing else."

"Surely it had pleasures, too, such a high position as yours!"

"I have not heard of them. I think my father had no pleasures, and I had only my books. Even with them I was not allowed my own way. I might grow frivolous, my father said. So it was only history, discoveries I might read about; no novels except a few Russian ones, which were horrible, and dreary, and hateful."

"Then, are you glad to be free from all the responsibility and the duties?"

"I cannot shake them off if I would. My father said

if I had to remain in exile I must always remember that I might be called any day to come back, and that then it would be my duty to go, whatever the danger. So you see I am not even now free."

He was answering her questions rather timidly, as if under compulsion, but with perfect straightforwardness; although he avoided meeting her eyes, it was plain that her beautiful voice had a great charm for him. Rose considered his answers, and the strange picture of a dreary life which they conjured up, for a short time in silence. Presently she said, with decision:

"You have been kept too much indoors. You want air and exercise."

Siegfried drew further into his corner and shivered. But she continued pitilessly:

"You have been kept studying in over-heated rooms till your health has given way, and nothing but a thorough change in your way of life can save you. Was not your father anxious about your health? Didn't he ever consult physicians about you?"

"Yes, I believe they said something of the kind you say, and then my father gave orders that I should go out more. And they took me out for one or two horrible drives from which I came back half frozen."

"Yes, because you were too much wrapped up. You ought to have gone in a little light two-wheeled thing, and have driven yourself."

"I drive!" exclaimed Siegfried in horror and disgust. "Really, madam, you don't seem to understand, in my country these occupations are not for persons of my position."

"In *my* country," answered Rose with robust disdain, "they are considered fitting occupations for any *man*."

Siegfried glanced at her out of the corners of his eyes in fear and perplexity, but not in anger. He was overwhelmed by the novelty of his situation. Here was a person, who not only had no respect for his high standard of refinement, but absolutely dared to sneer at him for it. He glanced at the chased gold smelling bottle which was as constantly in his hand as if he had been a woman, at his perfumed gloves, at the little morocco hand-bag which lay on the seat in front of him, open to display a multitude of trifles such as Rose would have contemned a woman for possessing. Her eyes followed his, and her lips curled as they fell upon the bag. Siegfried reddened.

"I suppose you think it effeminate for a man to like beautiful things, things which are works of art," said the prince, as he took up a gold match-box heavily set with rubies and showed it to her deprecatingly.

"Indeed, prince, I have no right to say, as I don't know any of the ladies of your country."

"Neither do I," answered Siegfried simply.

Rose turned to him in astonishment.

"Your mother, don't you remember her?"

"She died two days after I was born."

"And you have never had a sister?"

"No, I do not think I have in all my life before talked so much with any lady, or in fact with any woman, as I have with you."

Rose considered this extraordinary statement in all its bearings, deciding that the late king must have been strongly prejudiced against women, and that it was her lack of feminine softness and charm which induced him to make an exception in her favor. Although she was not vain, this idea was displeasing to her. There was a trace of annoyance in her tone as she said :

"And have you never been in love?"

"Oh, no," said Siegfried, as if rather disgusted by the suggestion.

"But your father intended you to marry?"

"Yes," he answered with an air of superiority, "but princes are not supposed to have to fall in love with their consorts, like merchants or peasants."

"Amongst us meaner folk the duty is, I believe, considered a not unpleasant one," said Rose drily.

Siegfried said nothing to this, but he looked offended. Presently Rose asked :

"How old are you?"

"I am twenty-five," he replied with great gravity.

She was utterly astonished, and scarcely believed him.

"I should have thought that you were about seventeen, if anything younger."

Siegfried moved uneasily under the gaze of her black eyes. If he had not been so preposterously effeminate and childish, her position as guardian of this young man would have been highly ridiculous; as it was, she felt that the charge would be merely tiresome, as long as it lasted. She would do her best to fulfil her compact with the dead king, but as she took note of first one sign of extreme delicacy and then another, hollow cheeks, shortness of breath, gradually increasing fatigue, she became rapidly convinced that Mr. Silchester need not trouble himself to get the young exile out of the way.

It was late in October, and the days were shortening. As dusk drew on Siegfried seemed to sleep in his corner, and Rose did not disturb him until she, at the other end of the carriage, was roused from a reverie by a faint moan. She hurried to him, and found that he was gasping for breath, and that his face was cold and wet. She instantly proceeded to open the window.

"No, no," he cried faintly, "not that. My salts; my flask——"

But Rose persisted. Siegfried, who was in the corner, with his face towards the engine, uttered a petulant cry as the cold air rushed in upon him, tried to pull up the window, and failing in that through Rose's interference, attempted to escape to the other end of the carriage. But Rose was tall and strong, and had had to cope with refractory patients before. If she was to do anything with this spoilt creature, keep him alive a little longer, or ease the remainder of his days, she must impress upon him complete submission to her authority. So she seized him in a muscular grip, and held him struggling and shivering at the window, until the murky, frosty air revived him against his will, and he almost cried to be allowed to go back into his corner.

"I'n—all—right—now—indeed," he gasped. "Do you—want to—kill me?"

"No," answered Rose calmly, as she loosened her grasp, and let him scurry away like a rabbit to the opposite side of the carriage. "Though really what pleasure there can be in living such a life as yours I can't imagine."

And the great black-robed woman cast at him a look of flashing disdain which made him cower and blink.

There was an uncomfortable silence, each feeling a passion of indignation at the conduct of the other,

and at the antipathetic tie which forced them into such companionship.

Rose had left the window open, being herself oppressed by the perfumes and essences with which the prince scented his clothes and saturated his handkerchiefs.

Siegfried, with all his effeminacy, felt a little spasm of pride or shame which prevented his making any further attempts to have it shut. It was not until he had had to endure the rapidly cooling atmosphere for quite half an hour that Rose had mercy on him and pulled up the window. As he remained immovable in the corner in which he had now entrenched himself, almost hidden in his coat and rugs, she thought he was sulking, and left him to himself. When they drew near London, however, and she had to consider the question of disposing of him for the night, she was obliged to break the long silence.

"Do you know London well? Where would you like to stay?" she asked.

He started at the sound of her voice, and looked at her in alarm. Rose saw that there were half-dried tears on his face, which he had been too proud to let her see him wipe away. She was struck with remorse on the instant. If he had been pampered and spoilt until no vestige of manliness could possibly be discovered in him, was it his fault? If his brain had

been over-crammed and his body allowed to remain inactive till he lost the proper powers of both, was he not to be pitied rather than blamed? In a rush of repentance Rose thought so. Taking the seat opposite to him, she held out her hand to take his, and said most sweetly:

"Do forgive me if I have been too hard. I only want to do what is best for you, but I'm such a harsh, arbitrary creature that I don't set about it exactly in the right way."

Poor Siegfried did not hesitate or hold aloof one moment; but bending down until his head rested on her lap, he buried his face in his hands and sobbed convulsively. Rose did her best to soothe him, blaming herself, encouraging him with a gentle voice and kindly touch.

"No, no, madam," said the young prince brokenly, between his sobs. "Do not blame yourself. It is I—I, who am foolish, useless. I am not brave and strong, as a prince should be. But I am alone, my father is dead. I am tossed I know not where. Madam, be merciful to me; I shall not have long life, I think. I shall die as my father died. It is decreed."

Rose Revel's strong hands closed round the unhappy lad's shoulders, as the maternal instinct which slumbers in the breast of every good woman sprang sud-

denly into vivid life within her, thrilling her voice with tenderness, warming her heart with pity. She raised the fair face with her hands, and looked into Siegfried's red, wet eyes with an intent earnestness which made him blink.

"My boy, my poor boy," she said, and the words lingered lovingly on her lips, "you will not die, if a woman's care can keep you alive. We will hide you away somewhere, and keep you quietly until you are strong and well, and by God's help can defy them."

But it was typical of the vague dread they both felt of a mysterious power and its workings, that neither mentioned a definite name or a definite danger. It was as if it hung in the air, breathed in with their breath, impalpable, awful, that they lowered their voices, gave a half-glance round, and brought their lips nearer to the ear of the other, as they alluded to the peril in which he stood.

Siegfried shook his head, and repeated "defy them!" with a little hollow, mocking laugh. But he found comfort in the warmth and heartiness of his companion, and drawing one of her hands between both his, he said, half-pleading, half-commanding:

"Sit here—by me."

Rose crossed over and sat by him.

"And now," she said, "we can't go to see this Mr. Combermere till to-morrow, and I want to know where you would like to stay."

But the prince would not take upon himself the responsibility of settling the smallest thing. He trusted himself in her hands like a child, as soon as she had touched his feelings.

"Anywhere, anywhere you like," said he docilely, drawing his hand affectionately over hers. "I will go with you wherever you please."

Rose felt again rather irritated by this lamb-like submission to the will of a stranger. She felt, too, that the situation was rather awkward. She could not go back to some lodgings which she had occupied by herself when a student in London with this young man in tow. On the other hand, his state of health would not justify her in leaving him at an hotel by himself, even if she had felt that it would be safe in other ways for her to do so. Although there seemed to be no reason why Mr. Silchester should try to snuff out a life which seemed only too likely to flicker out shortly of its own accord, she was too mistrustful of him to be for one moment easy unless her charge was in sight. She resolved, therefore, to take Siegfried to a very quiet hotel, not far from the Law Courts, where her family had been well known, and where her statement that she was the medical attendant of her rather eccentric companion would be accepted without question. Indeed, there was no room for doubt on this point. Siegfried had no sooner

stepped out on the platform at Euston than he fainted away, and she had to get the assistance of a porter to get him to a cab, where she loosened the clothes about his neck, and revived him with cold water.

When he came to himself, his teeth chattered and the tears ran down his cheeks ; so that, by the time they arrived at the hotel, Siegfried was such a piteous object, with livid cheeks and nose blue from cold, that it was quite unnecessary for Rose to give any explanation that he was an invalid. The only fear of the people about the place, as he staggered in, bent and shivering, was lest he should die before morning.

Rose had no difficulty in obtaining two rooms communicating the one with the other, so that she might keep watch over her charge during the night. To her surprise he sank very soon into a heavy sleep, from which he did not awake until late the next morning. Her suspicions being aroused by this, she questioned him closely, and got him at last, after several evasive answers, to confess that for the past year and more he had been in the habit of using a sleeping draught. She received the information very quietly, only asking who had recommended it. Again he hesitated a little, but at length said it was Donald Keith who had done so.

"My head used to ache so at the back," he explained, "so that I lay awake all night and could get

no rest ; and Donald got me this that I might have some sleep. I could not do without it now, indeed."

"Of course not," assented Rose. "Let me see what it is you take, please."

It was not without great difficulty that she conquered his reluctance to show it to her ; but, by dint of patient coaxing, she at last induced him to bring her a long-figured glass bottle which she had supposed to contain smelling salts. This, he said, would hold enough for three nights. As there was one dose left in the bottle she confiscated it, and decided, from the docility with which he submitted to this arbitrary action, that he had other supplies to draw upon. But she gave no hint of this suspicion, and turned her attention to the sort of breakfast he made. As she had expected, he ate scarcely anything, and drank nothing but a small glass of soda-water and milk. The meal finished, she told him to get ready to go with her to call upon Mr. Combermere. But he begged so hard to be left at home, pleading exhaustion, that she had to give in. Not having any great measure of trust in her patient, however, she did not leave him, but sent a telegram to the solicitor, asking him to call as early as he could.

In the meantime, Siegfried professed himself very tired, and withdrawing to his bedroom, which communicated on the one side with the small room in

which she had slept, and on the other with the sitting room where they breakfasted, he either fell or pretended to fall into a deep sleep.

Within two hours of the despatch of the telegram Mr. Combermere arrived. He was a middle-aged, prosperous-looking man, with a short manner and hard eyes, but he greeted Rose with a warmth which utterly surprised her.

"I daresay you are astonished, Miss Revel," he began, "to see anything like feeling in a dry old thing like me; but your father and I were the closest of friends throughout our college days, and though we met very little in after life, I never lost my old feeling for him as one of the grandest young fellows that ever lived. And so you never heard him mention my name?"

"Yes," said Rose, raising her head after a moment's pause, "I think I have. Percy Combermere?"

"That's it, that's my name," said the lawyer. "And now, Miss Revel, by what lucky chance have I this opportunity of making your acquaintance?"

"Unlucky chance, I am afraid," murmured Rose; "but what made you so sure I was the daughter of your friend?"

"I had heard that Charles Revel's daughter had become a sick nurse, for one thing; and I see his black eyes looking out from under his black brows in your face."

"Oh, yes," said Rose, "I am like my poor father, I know."

Then she proceeded to narrate the whole of the strange story in which she had played so unwelcome a part, and to hand him the letter from the dead king.

Mr. Combermere listened to her and read the letter in utter silence, and it was not until after a long pause, during which his face had worn an expression of the greatest severity, that he said in a very low voice, glancing at the closed folding-doors:

"And you have got the young cub here?"

Rose was astonished at the expression.

"The prince is here," she said.

"Well, you must give him up—have nothing more to do with him," said the lawyer peremptorily. "His father was a client of mine for years and years before he became a king, when he was living in England, picking up money here as he afterwards picked it up in Sergania. I know the stock; they are shifty, selfish, not to be relied on, not worth running into danger for. And it is danger. They have enemies who stick at nothing. As the father was got out of the way, so the son will be, and it is ruin for everybody who tries, vainly mind, to stand in the way. Now will you abide by my advice?"

"No," said Rose in a very low voice.

"Of course not, of course not; I knew it would be so. You are your father's child, noble-minded, resolute, pig-headed and—ridiculous: a woman, moreover, and impervious to reason," added Mr. Combermere irritably. "But surely it must be apparent to you that you, a young unmarried woman, can't become guardian to a young man about your own age."

Rose looked in front of her for a few moments.

"The idea sounds ridiculous until you see the young woman and the young man," she said. "But I think I could obviate the absurdity."

"How?"

"By getting married."

"Dear, dear, that's a strong measure. You must pardon me, Miss Revel, but I have heard of your engagement, and I can't but think the longer you delay the fulfilment of it the better it will be for you. You must excuse me for giving this marked and no doubt unpalatable advice——"

"I have to excuse it from everybody," said Rose with a laugh, not as if much moved in any way by his words.

"Well, whatever you do, don't rush into matrimony on account of this trust, as you call it, or you will increase tenfold the misfortune this affair is bound to bring upon you."

He had scarcely uttered the words when the door

of Siegfried's room opened slowly, and the young prince stood before them. He looked troubled and excited, and he glanced from the lawyer to Rose eagerly, as if trying to read their faces.

"I could not help but to hear," he began hoarsely, in an apologetic tone; "I try to sleep, but the words you both say reach me all the same, Madam," he continued, turning to Rose, while a faint flush came into his cheeks, "it is true what he says: I am selfish—not worth running into danger for. But I am not so selfish as to let you sacrifice yourself—the thought of your marrying is—is terrible, is distasteful so me. You must not. I have been kept like a boy; I will try to be a man, and take care of myself. I know not what these dangers are the gentleman speaks of, but I will be strong; I will meet them alone."

Even as he spoke, however, the colour faded out of his cheeks and left them livid, his breath grew short, his voice weak, while his whole frame trembled. Thinking he was on the point of fainting, Rose hurried across the room to him, and, with a soothing, supporting hand under his arm, led him to the sofa, on which she sat down beside him.

"You see, prince," she began in the rich, musical voice which had so strong an influence upon him, "unluckily for you, it does not lie with you to make or break my compact with your father. Whether

you choose or not, I intend to haunt you like your shadow. There is nothing for you to do but to submit."

He looked at her with grateful, timid eyes, but said nothing. Mr. Combermere, who had risen from his chair on the prince's entrance, now said with an air of decision, and not without subdued impatience :

"You have decided then?"

"Yes," said Rose.

"Very well. Then if you will let me know your pleasure in the matter, I will wait on you or see you at my office, and inform you of the arrangements his late majesty was pleased to make."

"Tell her now," interposed Siegfried, in a voice termbling with eagerness.

Rose inclined her head in acquiescence.

Mr. Combermere bowed to the prince, who begged him to be seated. Reopening the letter Rose had given him the lawyer glanced through it, and said, turning to Siegfried :

"Briefly, the provisions of your late illustrious father are these :—He wishes you to reside in England, for the present at least; and places the formation of your establishment in the hands of Miss Revel, who is to draw on me for funds to maintain it adequately. Further, Miss Revel is to draw a private allowance of £200 per annum so long as your royal highness' life is happily spared."

The prince gave a short laugh.

"Ah," he cried triumphantly, turning to Rose, "you see, madam, my father trusted you to the extent of believing that my very life lay in your hands. I wish," he added wistfully, in a lower tone, "that I could believe so."

"I will do my best, prince," said Rose rather coldly.

The lawyer, who had been standing obsequiously near the door during this short colloquy, now took formal leave, and guardian and charge were left together.

CHAPTER IX.

A DANGEROUS TRUST.

It was a curious situation for two young people of five-and-twenty to find themselves in, though the helplessness of the one and the helpfulness of the other did something to hide the fact.

Siegfried seemed a good deal exhausted by the excitement of the morning, but he was in very good spirits at the result of the lawyer's visit, and suddenly surprised Rose by laying his head on her shoulder like a child.

"Oh, madam," he whispered, "is it selfish to be so glad you are going to stay with me? I will do just what you will, indeed, so that you shall not be unhappy."

"Oh course you will, prince," said Rose; and gently removing his head from her shoulder, she made him lie down on the sofa; "because I shall wish for nothing but to see you grow well and strong as fast as possible."

"Ah, yes, that you may leave me to marry this gentleman you spoke of!" cried Siegfried, starting up uneasily.

Rose's rejoinder was made in a tone of studied coldness.

"I did not bind myself to remain single all my life, prince, when I promised your father to do what I could for his son."

"Of course not, madam, of course not," said Siegfried very humbly. And for a few moments he lay resting quietly, watching her with furtive eyes as she sat down to the table and directed the envelopes of some already-written letters. But presently he broke out again, with great deference, but in a tone of some bitterness:—"This gentleman, madam, who has the happiness of being loved by you, he is no doubt very handsome and clever and accomplished?"

"He is good-looking, certainly. I don't know that he is specially clever, but he is strong and manly, and can row and ride and drive," said Rose, assuming an enthusiasm she did not feel, as she thought it might have a good moral effect.

But as a matter of fact her lover's fondness for road and river had been indulged at some expense to herself.

"And you," she went on after a pause, "will find that even princesses care more for a man who takes some interest in manly sports than for one who does not."

"I don't care what princesses think," said he rather petulantly.

"Not yet, perhaps. But you will when you have made the acquaintance of the Princess Ottilie, as you will do in the course of a few weeks."

The prince sat up and looked at her in blank astonishment. She returned his stare with a gaze of quiet resolution.

"The marriages of princes are arranged for them; you know you told me so yourself. And in order that yours may be arranged the more easily—and with the least possible trouble to yourself—" she threw in with a slight touch of irony, "you are going to live in the neighborhood of the lady your father chose for you, where your courtship can be consummated with all possible despatch. And now," she continued, rising from her chair, "I have an appointment with a friend who will give me a personal introduction to Sir Ambrose Fenning, the minister. So I must ask you to excuse me for a little while, prince."

And with very few more words, she left him.

Rose found that there was even more foundation than she had feared for Siegfried's shrewd doubts as to the value of a politician's friendship. Sir Ambrose was courtesy itself, deeply grieved at his late friend's mysterious death, much interested in the welfare of his son. But he was sure that he could do no good by inquiries into the mystery, which was no doubt

an affair of private malice, quite unconnected with politics; neither would it be any advantage to Siegfried for him to see him; he was quite sure the lad was in the best of hands, etc., etc.; and the idea of taking him to live quietly in the country to recruit his health was an admirable one. As for the notion that Russia could entertain a grudge against either father or son, it was laughable. We were on friendly terms with the Tsar's government, which, therefore, could for the present do no wrong.

Rose retired disgusted, heartsick, but scarcely surprised. At the door of the hotel, on her return, she met her darling sister and her less-fondly-loved *fiancé*. The former dragged her into a sitting-room, and hung, speechless with deep feeling, on her neck, both girls struggling to keep back their tears.

Ermyntrude was a lovely girl of twenty, soft-eyed, fair-haired, very fragile looking. She was to start for Madeira in a few days, in the care of some friends.

"Rose, I can scarcely believe that I'm going. And it's all your doing, all yours; I should have died this winter in England during the black fogs—I know it, I feel it. But how did you manage it, dear? I don't understand. Have you made some great, some awful sacrifice? This young fellow—we have seen him—he says you are his guardian. Is it true, as Gerard suggests, that he is subject to fits of madness, and that you are——"

"His keeper?" suggested Rose laughing. "No, certainly it is not true. What put it into your head, Gerard, to think of such a thing?"

She turned to her *fiancé*, Gerard Fowler, to whom so far she had vouchsafed nothing more than a handshake.

"Well," answered the young man laughing, "young fellows of that age don't generally require guardians of yours. And as he is evidently rather a moony young person, it seemed the natural conclusion to arrive at. The way he talked about you, as if you were a saint or angel, was most absurd. Ermyntrude and I were in fits of laughter the whole time."

Ermyntrude looked at him with a curious expression.

"I don't think *I* was in fits of laughter," she said gently. "I thought it was pretty and touching to hear him talk as he did. I think, Gerard, if you were to show a little more of the same kind of absurdity it would not be out of place."

But Gerard was much too light-hearted, and had much too good an opinion of himself to be in the least put out by this rebuke, which Ermyntrude delivered in a sweet, meek voice. He was a handsome young fellow, and lively and amusing, and he put on his most winning manner this evening with

the object of inducing Rose to marry him off-hand. This, however, she steadily refused to do, and, to Gerard's disgust, her sister upheld her resolution. When he found her obdurate, he changed his tone suddenly, and asked abruptly :—

“Do you want to throw me over, Rose?”

“Certainly not.”

“On your word of honor?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. But don't forget, if you should change your mind, that you will be dealing with a desperate man.”

Rose calmed him with some kind and reassuring words, without in the least believing what he said. But Ermyntrude, who was in the room throughout the whole of the interview, looked troubled and anxious. She managed to outstay Gerard, who had to keep an appointment at the hospital, and as soon as the young man had taken leave, with more display of tenderness than usual, she seized her sister's arm, and spoke to her very solemnly.

“Rose,” she said, “you don't understand that man a bit. You have been so used to think too little of yourself that you don't understand when a person thinks too little of you. He looks upon you without a quarter of the real affection you ought to inspire, yet with plenty of real jealousy. Promise

me, promise me, Rose, just to put the finishing touch to all you have done for me, not to marry him until I come back, *whatever* he should say, mind, *whatever* he should do!"

Without much reluctance, but laughing at her sister's earnestness, Rose gave the required promise, and they separated, each thinking more of the other than of herself.

But even Ermyntrude, now that her safety was provided for, had to give place in Rose's thoughts to anxiety about her singular charge, for an encounter she had on the following day stirred up all her old fears. She had just settled two important matters; one was the taking of a furnished house a few miles out of Scarborough, which the agent had personally inspected, and which seemed to be in every way suitable; the other was the engagement, as nominal housekeeper to the prince, of a most highly respectable middle-aged lady, who promised to make an admirable figurehead to the singular establishment.

As Rose left the house where she had seen Mrs. Willoughby Thomson, the housekeeper-elect, she ran, in turning the corner at the end of the street, against a gentleman who was coming from the opposite direction. He raised his hat in apology, and then, as if with great surprise, ejaculated: "Mrs. Revel! Is it possible? What good fortune!"

She turned sick at heart. For it was Mr. Silchester.

She felt at once that this meeting was not accidental. This was an obscure street, in a shabby-genteel suburb, not one of the big West End thoroughfares where a meeting is no coincidence. She knew now that her movements were watched, spied upon. She stood quite still, answering shortly his inquiries about her health, her movements. When he allowed her to walk on, she did not know what to do, what to think; that the meeting boded ill for her charge she knew. A few moments later she heard the soft, bland voice again at her ear.

"Oh, I think it is only just to tell you, Mrs. Revel, that if unhappily your care of your young friend should prove unavailing—and that he is in an extremely delicate state of health we know—the allowance to you offered by his father during your care of him would still be kept up, perhaps, under certain circumstances increased, by—by the young prince's friends."

"Thank you," Rose had enough presence of mind to stammer out.

"Good evening."

"Good evening."

He did not vanish in a cloud of burning sulphur, as Rose felt that he ought to do, but walked away,

looking, in his fur-lined overcoat, a very distinguished and well-dressed person.

Rose got back to the hotel in a fever of disquietude. Not until, two days later, she was in the train with Siegfried on the way to their new Northern home, did she lose the fanciful belief that Mr. Silchester was a few steps away, ready to confront her. She knew very well that the feeling of security afforded by the railway carriage was fanciful also; Mr. Silchester might be in the next compartment. But she nourished the hope that he would trust in her supposed depravity, and leave her in peace for a little while with her charge, thus giving her time to concoct some scheme for thwarting his designs upon the lad.

Siegfried, who had complained of the frequent absences from him which the preparation for departure entailed, was in a state of high delight at the prospect of having her all to himself for some hours, and he naïvely told her so. Rose, for seeing that the young gentleman proposed to fasten himself upon her as he had done upon his tutor, Donald Keith, deemed it necessary to give a fillip to his self-dependence.

"Yes," she said, "it is as well we should have an opportunity of establishing our acquaintance now, for when we are once settled down we shall not be able to see much of each other."

Siegfried's face fell.

"But you are to be my guardian, and—and—— Are you not going to be my guardian?" he suddenly asked quite plaintively.

"Why, yes," said Rose, laughing a little, and casting at him a glance of half-shy amusement; "but when I promised your father to be a guardian and a mother to his son, and all that, the way in which he spoke of you led me to make the ridiculous mistake of supposing that you were a little boy—a child. Now, you can see for yourself that—that to be a guardian to a—young man, grown-up, as you are, is quite a different thing, is absurd, in fact."

"I don't see that at all," began Siegfried with an unexpected burst of eager interest.

Rose held up her hand to check the interruption.

"All that I can do is to help you back to health in my capacity of nurse," she went on, "and that I will do if you will yourself do all you can to help me. But, remember, I am no magician; I am quite powerless to do you any good unless you submit to my prescriptions, which, I perceive, you will find difficult. Exercise, fresh air, cold water," she continued in a very authoritative tone.

"I will do whatever you wish," he said humbly. "My father put me into your care. He was much wiser than I shall ever be. Therefore, whatever you tell me to do must be right."

He spoke with the submission of a strong religious conviction; and Rose, whom he alternately amused, touched and irritated, felt her heart soften towards him again.

"You are expecting a great deal too much from me, just as your father did," she said.

Siegfried drew nearer to her.

"I don't think so," he said with decision. "It seems to me that I begin to understand why my father chose you as my guardian. At first I thought you were hard and cruel and unfeeling, and there was something in your face which frightened me. But now the longer I know you, the more I feel that it will be easier for me to do hard things because you wish it, than for the wish of any one else. Your voice is so sweet, so deep, like music to listen to; and the touch of your hand so gentle that I feel I could do a great deal just for the pleasure of having it on my arm. Now, that is very strange, is it not?"

"Very," said Rose.

But she did not think so. Although the broad lines on which her character was framed precluded any such little feminine graces as a touch of coquetry, she could not be ignorant that the phenomena described by the young prince so ingenuously were merely the results of two facts: that she was a woman. and the first woman with whom he had had

any but the most casual acquaintance. She could scarcely help smiling at the almost incredible boyishness of his remarks upon this subject, contrasting as it did strongly with the shrewdness he had incidentally displayed on other matters. She took care, however, that he should not suppose she was laughing at him, especially as he was expanding into complete confidence towards her.

"So that if you will only stay near me," he went on more earnestly than ever, "you will find that I will submit myself to you in all ways, just as my father wished."

"Certainly, I will stay near you, prince, until your health is restored," said Rose.

Some inkling of a suspicion broke in upon Siegfried through the formality of her tone. A tinge of pink color came into his cheeks as she went on:—

"The king, your father, bought my services at a royal price, so that you have a claim upon me which nothing can alter."

Siegfried looked uneasy and rather disappointed.

"Bought, you say! He bought your service! So you only found me out and were kind to me just as a hired servant would do his duty?"

"Exactly. As a hired servant," said Rose drily. He grew crimson.

"I did not mean that, madam. I am clumsy. I

have not known many ladies. But I had hopes—" he went on, while his eyes filled suddenly with tears, "you were so kind. I thought perhaps you were sorry for me, and believed me to be in danger, and that your heart told you to find me. That is all."

She saw that he was a little wounded, and she spoke very gently in answer to him, using her voice in the persuasive tones which had already proved able to charm him.

"My heart had no chance to move in the matter, for I was bound by a promise to find you almost as soon as I heard of your existence."

Siegfried bent forward in an attitude of deep attention, and looked intently into her face as she went on :—

"I told him I was in great trouble about a dear sister, who was in danger of dying for want of money to take her abroad. Your father at once insisted on my accepting a large sum of money for this purpose ; with the condition that in return for his trying to save my darling, I should devote myself to his."

Siegfried was interested, but not pleased. He moved restlessly in his chair, thinking out the situation ; and at last he said :—

"But that was not fair. It was easy for him to give money, and the temptation was too great for you to refuse. It was selling your own liberty ; I will not have it !"

"You cannot go against the wishes of your father. But you can make my duty towards you easy or difficult as you choose."

Siegfried burst into a passion of tears. Though almost ruined in body and mind by a system of education mistaken on his father's part, wilfully pernicious on that of his tutor, he was naturally devoid neither of intelligence nor feeling; his imagination had been stirred in a wholly unaccustomed manner by the romantic circumstances of his first acquaintance with a woman. He had been kept sedulously out of range of feminine influence of any kind; his father fearing it would interfere with his studies, Donald Keith having another and equally strong reason. It followed naturally, therefore, that he was now ready to become the slave of any woman who should think it worth while to learn how to manage him.

"I understand," said Siegfried with a sob; "you are determined to fulfil your promise to the letter, although I am personally distasteful to you."

"But that is not true! What put such an idea into your head?" cried Rose, surprised.

"I have seen it in your face," said he.

Ah! That face of hers! Only the fire of some strong feeling, such as the love she bore her sister, or the pity she had by moments felt for himself, could

melt the hardness which black brows and firmly closed mouth gave to her face. She gave an impatient sigh; she was tired of trying to explain away to everybody the forbidding effect of her dark eyebrows. Instead, she tried an experiment as to that perfect submission he had promised.

"I don't pretend," she began cautiously, "to be very enthusiastic about people whom I don't know well. But, if you are straightforward with me, you will never have to complain of my dislike. The question is: are you always straightforward?"

"Straightforward!" echoed the prince, as if not quite understanding. "You mean ——?"

"Honest, concealing nothing that for your sake I ought to know."

"I—I think so, I believe so," said Siegfried in a rather offended tone.

Rose smiled rather satirically at the tone, and continued demurely:—

"That sleeping-draught, for instance, that you have been in the habit of taking, and that I tell you is bad, pernicious; have you not a secret store by you, of which I am supposed to know nothing?"

As she had expected, the habits of his rank proved stronger than his much-talked-of submission.

"I did not understand," he said haughtily, "that every action of my private life was to be spied upon."

And he left his place beside her and withdrew to the other end of the carriage. Rose, with one mocking, amused look, took a book out of her bag and settled herself to read. But this utterly new and interesting experience of quarreling with a woman had really too much fascination to be sacrificed for a quiet sulk by oneself. After casting at Rose two or three haughty glances, which she did not even appear to see, Siegfried said at last, irritably:—

“Is it really necessary for me to have every little bottle and case on my toilet-table examined?”

“Certainly not, prince,” answered Rose, without looking up from her book. “I only do it out of vulgar curiosity and impertinence, nothing more.”

There was a long silence, the prince remaining buried in his rugs and furs, with his eyes fixed vacantly on the moving landscape, except for an occasional furtive glance at Rose. At last he got up, took down his traveling bag, opened it, and crossed over to his companion with something in his hand. It was a large bottle, filled with a semi-transparent fluid. He sat down on the opposite seat, and gently placed the bottle in her lap.

“It was quite true, you were quite right,” he said in a whisper. “I had more of this than I told you, and I have more now. But I will give all the rest to you as soon as I get my trunks, and if you would

like to examine them you can. I will give you my word of honor to give you all. And now speak kindly to me, make your voice soft, forgive me."

The spark of warmth which changed Rose Revel's face into tender beauty flashed from her black eyes as she looked at him. Siegfried noted it at once, and threw himself on the seat beside her, leaning against her, gazing at her with new light in his own soft blue eyes.

"Ah, ah!" he cried joyfully. "That is right, that is right. Look at me like that, and I could follow you to the end of the world!"

And Rose, rather frightened, told him gently that he must be tired; he had better lie back in the corner and rest. He did so, retreating, meek as lamb; but continued to gaze at her with a frank affection which troubled her a little, as, while it might smooth her difficulties in one direction, it might raise fresh anxieties in another.

Rose was not long in proving the truth of this surmise. The house she had taken proved to be a solidly-build stone erection, very plain outside and very comfortable within; and Mrs. Thomson, who had arrived with the servants earlier in the day, had made good fires and prepared a welcome meal. Siegfried, who followed Rose about with his eyes, and appeared uneasy when she was out of his sight, insisted on her

choosing a room for him. Although worn out with fatigue, he refused to retire for the night until she did ; and inquired, as he bade her good-night at the foot of the staircase, at what time in the morning she would be down. Rose answered him rather shortly, feeling that this devotion was becoming ridiculous. But she did not yet know to what length his most innocent submission to her will would carry him.

She did not retire to rest at once, having her accounts for the day to settle. She was busy with pencil and note-book when she heard stealthy footsteps in the corridor, stopping outside her door. Opening it she found, as she had feared, Siegfried ; he had thrown himself on to an ottoman which stood in a recess opposite to the door of her room.

"Why, prince, what are you doing here" she asked. "You will catch cold, with that window at your back!"

"Yes, it is cold," he said, shivering as he rose submissively. "But I cannot sleep, madam ; you know I told you I could not without what you will not let me have. And you spoke to me last as if I had offended you ; and feeling that, I could not even rest. Forgive me, madam, I hope I have not disturbed you."

Then Rose grew very kind, and ran downstairs to hunt in her trunks for a book that should amuse him.

And, seeming to regard this as a sort of talisman, he seized the volume from her hand, and went off with it to his room quite contentedly,

The very next day Rose began to profit, in his interest, by the submission he continued to show to her lightest wish. She made him walk, encouraging him to go longer and longer distances as the bracing air from the North Sea and her own careful treatment invigorated his at first feeble frame. She made him drive and ride, and learn to row and to sail a boat, until not only did his movements become agile, but the flush of health came into his cheeks and made the always amiable face handsome; so that when the spring came he was ready, Rose felt, to begin his courtship of the Princess Ottilie.

One bright day in March, therefore, Rose Revel despatched her charge, in the dogcart he had learnt to drive, into Scarborough, to pay his first ceremonious call. The lady's friends having been duly apprised of the impending event, and having signified their gracious readiness to receive him, Rose felt pretty sure, as she looked at him, of a successful issue to his hopes. Were they hopes, though, that made his fair face so troubled, so wistful, as he sat, whip in hand, delaying to start, and looking down at Rose with a very grave face?

"Well," said Rose, with amused sharpness, "what

are you waiting for? You need not look so solemn. You look very nice. I'm sure any woman, princess or not, might be proud to have you for a suitor."

"Any woman!" repeated Siegfried wistfully. "Ah, no, madam. If that were true I should not be troubling the princess."

Then, flushing scarlet, and evidently very much afraid that he had taken a liberty which would never be pardoned, he gave the horse a touch of the whip, and started off without daring to cast another glance at her.

Rose, unluckily for herself, was not so flinty-hearted as he imagined. She had a choking sensation in her throat as she turned away, and thought that, in the course of a few weeks, she should have to give up the charge, which, beginning as a burden, had become the great joy of her life. Siegfried's faults were chiefly on the surface; and as her care corrected these, the young fellow's really sweet nature became revealed more and more, until he had got as firm a hold on her heart as she had on his. Of this, however, he, reverencing her above all women was entirely unconscious.

Uneasy, heartsore, and even a little jealous, Rose decided to take a long walk to rouse herself out of her growing melancholy. Before she had gone a hundred yards from the house, however, a trouble

much greater than that from which she was suffering suddenly rose up to overwhelm her. Hearing the wheels of a cab approaching the house, she turned, and saw, peeping out of the window, the cat-like face of the Scotch tutor, Donald Keith.

In an instant Rose felt overwhelmed with passionate anxiety. She had hoped, living quietly up here, far away from the strife of politics and the roar of the world, that Siegfried would be forgotten or ignored by his enemies. And now, just as she was arriving successfully at the very summit of the dead king's hopes for his son, the old danger had sprung up at Siegfried's very feet. With a heavy heart Rose turned back towards the house.

For she knew that the fatuous-faced Donald was but the envoy of the dreaded Mr. Silchester.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENEMY UNMASKS.

ROSE reached the house on foot almost as soon as Donald Keith in his cab. He was in the hall, asking for Siegfried, when she came in and greeted him with a cold bow, without offering her hand.

"We don't call him 'prince' here," she said, as she led him into the drawing-room. "He is simply Siegfried von Dortmund-Albisheim, and as even that is a cumbrous title for a man who leads the life of a plain country gentleman, he is generally known about here as Mr. Albisheim."

"What, at Scarborough?" broke out Donald sharply. "The Princess von Marienburg knows who he is!"

Rose blushed crimson with apprehension. Donald had certainly by this abrupt speech learnt what he wanted to know, but it was at the cost of unmasking entirely; Rose knew now what fear it was that had brought Siegfried's enemies on his track again.

"She doesn't know much more about him than his name at present," she answered quietly.

"Ah," said Donald, looking at her still suspiciously, as he relapsed into his habitual drawl. "That is well. I had feared, from reports I had heard, that injudicious acquaintances had been endeavoring to promote a union which, considering the fragile state of health of my late beloved pupil, would have been most unwise."

"Interference in these matters is generally unwise," said Rose coldly. "However, you will be delighted to hear that the health of your late pupil has much improved."

He said he was delighted, but the lie came ill from his lips; and, during the three weary hours which elapsed before Siegfried's return, Mr. Silchester's unfortunate emissary remained oppressed and dejected.

The appearance of the young prince, when at last he burst in radiant and full of life, was simply a knockdown blow to his late tutor, who gazed in stupefaction at the results of six months of fresh air and wholesome, happy life. Siegfried, on his side, stepped back in amazement, caused partly by Donald's unexpected arrival, but even more by the new light in which he saw him. The fatuous self-complacency, the shifty, cunning look of the eyes, surely these had not been characteristics of the Donald he had loved! He held out his hand, feeling that he was disloyal to his old friendship, but the very effusiveness with which

the Scotchman greeted him was distasteful and repulsive to him. He kept glancing, with unconscious appeal, at Rose, who, less artless than he, steadily avoided meeting the prince's eyes.

At last a message brought to her by one of the servants from Mrs. Thomson obliged her to leave the two young men together. Donald, feeling that the influence antagonistic to his own was now withdrawn, instantly set about regaining his lost footing. He crossed to where Siegfried sat, and, throwing himself upon one knee, poured out in a highly dramatic manner a long impassioned recital of the agony of mind he had suffered in being separated from one in whom his whole soul was bound up with fervent loyalty.

"Why didn't you come and see me before, then?" asked Siegfried simply.

He believed Donald's professions with almost perfect faith, and blamed himself for the fact that they no longer touched his heart. But though he had long ceased to feel hurt at his late tutor's defection, it remained to be accounted for. The other was ready.

"You know," he began, "that I belong to a cult which enables my soul, my higher self, to wander where my will leads it, apart from its gross bodily envelope."

"I have often heard you say so," said the prince.

"Need I tell you, prince, who was the object of my solicitude when, my body forced by worldly cares to remain away from you, my higher, my true self found joy in witnessing your joy, sorrow in sharing your sorrow."

"I have had no sorrow since I have been living here," said Siegfried, with the first touch of incredulity he had shown.

"Not acute sorrow, perhaps, but there have been moments when the pure effulgence of your spirit has been dimmed, when your soul cried aloud for companionship with one akin to it in sympathies, in aspirations."

"Not with Rose near me," said the prince softly. And then he blushed, and appeared startled by the course his thoughts were pursuing.

Donald looked discomfited. The prince, after a short pause, turned to him again suddenly.

"And what has made you come to see me now, Donald?"

"My soul, prince, told me you were in danger, though I know not of what kind."

"Well, no more do I. I cannot imagine any danger coming near me now, while——"

He stopped, and his face changed. Donald began again very differently:—

"This lady, prince, this Nurse Revel, who has, I

am quite sure, done her best to fulfil her duty towards your highness, with all due respect and deference to a person of your rank—"

He paused. Siegfried smiled.

"You don't want me to suspect danger from *her*?"

"I—I don't know, prince. Your Highness has attractions which may have dazzled her.—I believe she is still young—to the point of making her forget the distance between her rank and yours. She may even——"

Siegfried rose, evidently deeply moved, and crossed the room to the window. Donald having stopped short, as if in diffidence, there was silence for a few minutes. Then the prince laughed uneasily.

"Donald," he said, earnestly, "if I could think, not that what you have suggested is true—for what is there in me to dazzle a woman like *her*? But if I thought it possible she could care for me, in the way you mean, in spite of all my faults, my miserable weakness, my terrible inferiority to her in every way I should be happier than any man in the world, happier than I could ever deserve."

A gleam of satisfaction passed over Donald's fair, fat face.

"But, surely, prince, you forget that you might be throwing away chances of an alliance in every way suitable to your rank and—and possible prospects."

"You mean Princess Ottilie? I wouldn't think twice of an Empress if only Rose would have me," burst out Siegfried impetuously. "But, hush! For Heaven's sake don't let her guess what you have said to me, or I to you. I wouldn't offend her for the whole world!"

As he finished speaking, Rose, whose voice he had heard in the hall, re-entered the room; and a few moments later a servant announced that dinner was ready. There was such a strong sense of constraint, and Rose was so much troubled by the portent of the tutor's arrival, that the conversation during dinner was left almost wholly to Donald and Mrs. Thomson, who was delighted with the excitement of a visitor. But the young prince could not let the evening pass without a little talk with her. After having abstained all the evening from the shortest *tête-à-tête*, his forbearance broke down when they were all separating for the night. There was a new light of shy, wistful, doubting hope in his eyes as he detained her gently at the foot of the staircase when the others had gone up.

"I—I have scarcely seen you to-day," he said in a hoarse, trembling voice.

"You have been better employed than in gossiping with your old nurse," said Rose, without looking at him, trying to speak cheerfully. "How did you get on with the princess?"



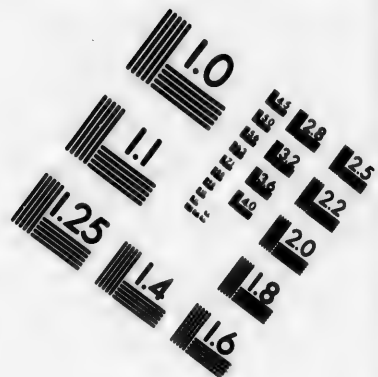
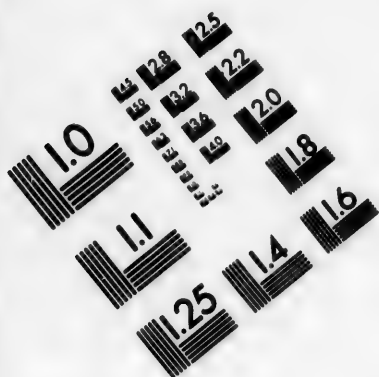
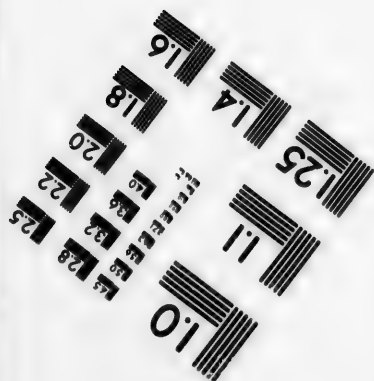
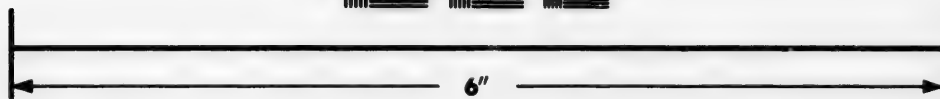
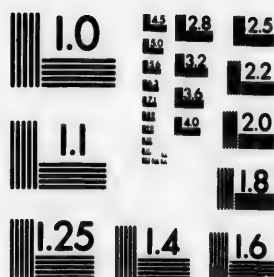


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"Oh, all right," said he hastily. "At least, I mean, I saw her, and she was very civil, and so of course was I; and we smiled and smirked and repeated all the pretty things we had made up and——"

"Don't speak so flippantly, sir," interrupted Rose severely. "Remember you are talking of the lady who, we hope, is to be your wife, and I—I who am engaged myself—" she went on hurriedly, "will not have the subject treated in that way."

The young man's face fell. His modest hope had been too weak for him to see that this speech was only made to hide her real feelings. He felt at once that he was a guilty and presumptuous wretch.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said falteringly, "indeed you would not hear me speak so of—of *your* marriage, where the lady would be deeply loved."

Rose trembled with sudden emotion. After a pause she said with an effort:—

"Why should you not deeply love the princess? I have heard she is amiable, and very beautiful. Is that not so?"

"I don't know," said he indifferently. "Yes, I should suppose she is not unamiable. But as for beauty, her face wants something. It has no fire, no character. And she is too fair."

He blushed crimson as he uttered this last complaint with just a shy, swift glance at the handsome,

black-browed face before him. Poor Rose was deeply troubled by a sudden intuition that Siegfried's conduct this evening was the result of his conversation with Donald; and she half-guessed the truth, that the prince's hitherto unspoken love for herself was simply being used as a means of breaking off the preliminaries of the match she was arranging for him. This, she guessed, was the last use to which she was to be put before she was cast aside as a tool which had done its work—too well. With her heart aching for her boy, her arms yearning to close round his fair head, she only said, with an effort, turning away that she might not meet the tender blue eyes:—

"Too fair! Too fair! Ah, if that is the worst complaint you have to bring against her, you must not expect much sympathy from anybody. Good-night, prince."

"Say Siegfried," he whispered wistfully. "You never call me prince now. Say it, or I shall think I have displeased you, and I shall not sleep."

The great black eyes turned upon him full of soft light, of passion subdued. Her long, capable, white right hand, vibrating with feeling, touched his fair hair and lay for an instant upon his head with a warm pressure.

"God bless you, Siegfried, and keep you safe from all harm," she murmured with shaking lips.

Turning swiftly upstairs, not daring to stay another moment, Rose heard certain soft, creaking movements overhead, and doubling her speed she was in time to see Donald Keith, without his shoes, escaping to his room. He had been listening. Rose understood the gentleman so well that she thought no worse of him than she had done before.

Donald had come prepared to stay, so that Siegfried felt bound to invite him to do so; but hard as the former tried to re-establish his influence over the younger man, the power of Rose was too strong for him to secure more than the faintest success in that direction. In another, however, he was more fortunate. From his next visit to Princess Otilie, Siegfried returned haughty and furious, declaring that he would never see her again. Rose discovered, after much patient pressing, that the offence he believed himself to have received was connected with her. Guessing, therefore, who was the author of the mischief, she pressed him no further, but went by herself to Scarborough, and from the princess' friends learned the whole truth. Donald Keith had called upon them in the character of Siegfried's oldest and best friend, and had implored them to help him in rescuing the prince from the infatuation under which he labored for a designing woman who had got hold of him. On Siegfried's second visit, therefore, a most guarded

allusion to this supposed fact on the part of the princess' aunt and guardian had drawn from the young man such an outburst of passionate indignation as she had not supposed the gentle prince capable of, and he had taken his leave abruptly in spite of remonstrances. The old lady had since made inquiries which satisfied her of the falsehood of Donald's insinuations, and she made most graceful apology to Rose, and said she should be happy to receive the prince again.

Rose returned home full of righteous anger against the meddling Donald, and resolved that, since he had become actively mischievous, the moment for his exposure had come. She found the two young men together, and something in the expression of each helped her to the conclusion that the Scotchman had, craftily but vainly, been endeavoring to poison Siegfried's mind against her. The idea of "her boy," as she considered Siegfried, having his mind perverted after all her loving care of him, inflamed her with passionate wrath which caused her to fling prudence to the winds. She stood erect before the young men with the air of a Juno, and, rejecting the caressing hand with which Siegfried would have helped her off with the flowing nurse's cloak she always wore out of doors, she fixed her fierce eyes on his companion and said :

"I have just come from Scarborough, from the Princess Ottilie and her friends. I find that you,

Donald Keith, had been there before me, spreading injurious reports about my character."

Donald turned pink to the roots of his pale hair, and fell to shaking and stammering. Siegfried, startled, distressed, incredulous, looked from the one to the other without a word, trying to understand.

"Really, madam," said Donald, trying to recover his dignity, and poising his head more loftily than ever, "I—I assure you I am quite at a loss to understand your accusations. There was no more reason why I should not call upon the princess' friends than—In short, I said nothing about you but what I had heard from—from friends in fact."

"From Mr. Silchester?" said Rose, with a burning blush, as she remembered suddenly what his ideas were on the subject of her character.

"Yes, madam," said Donald, profiting quickly by her evident consternation. "Certain reports had come to him far more malicious than any I would circulate about any lady."

Rose had turned deadly white, for she could neither incriminate herself before her boy nor exculpate herself before his enemy. She had not time to decide what course to pursue when Siegfried's voice, startling her by the new decision of its tones, broke upon her.

"I am sorry," he said, "to have to seem inhospitable."

table to a man who was once my friend. But the claims of Rose are highest of all. Donald, my house cannot shelter the man who could breathe one word against her."

"Very well, prince," purred Donald, at once retreating towards the door with a low bow. "Then, I have the honor to wish you and the lady good-day. And I am happy to think that I can give a good account of her health and spirits to Madam Landeghem."

He thought this shot would tell, and let himself out of the door as Rose started. She turned quickly to Siegfried, anxious to lose no time in putting herself right in his eyes.

"I want to explain to you how it is that he thinks so ill of me," she began with fierce eagerness.

Siegfried went up to her affectionately, and put one hand gently on her mouth. His face was very grave.

"Do you think," he said, "I would allow *you* to give explanations to *me*? You don't yet understand how I feel for you. Anybody, no matter how dear to me, who should dare to utter a word against you in my hearing, or to my knowledge, would go straight out of my heart and my life, as the princess and her friends went the other day, and as Donald Keith went just now."

"But you will call upon the princess again?" asked Rose in alarm.

"No."

"But it was not their fault. They made the most graceful apologies!"

"I have decided that I don't want to marry yet, perhaps not at all," said Siegfried restlessly.

And Rose, foreseeing a danger in his excited manner, forbore to press the matter further, and made an excuse to leave him to himself.

The same dangerous subject came to the front again two days later, however, in an abrupt and startling manner. Rose, who had been careful to avoid any chance of a private conversation with Siegfried since Donald's departure, was taking a walk by herself in a straggling wood not far from the house, when she was startled by the sudden appearance before her of Gerard Fowler. He had been watching for her, he said; and bursting out into violent reproaches of her for her perfidious conduct, her inconstancy, her heartlessness, he accused her of wishing to jilt him for the sake of a man who was better off than he, but who could never care for her as he did.

Rose listened very quietly, though she was frightened. For, since she had been keeping up her correspondence with him without any hint of a desire to break it off, it was clear that this visit and attack had been instigated by some one more to be dreaded than he.

"All this is nonsense," she said calmly. "I have no more wish to jilt you, as you call it, than I have ever had. But I should like to know who put these ideas into your head."

He disclaimed the notion of having been instigated by any one, without, however, convincing her. She was about to signify her disgust at his conduct by leaving him without further parley, when he suddenly proceeded from words to action; and, seizing her by the wrists, declared himself so passionately jealous that he would not allow her to return to the house, but demanded that she should come back to London with him immediately, and, by marrying him at once, give him the right to protect her against the slanderers who, he asserted, were busy with her name.

A suspicion darted into Rose's mind which blanched her cheeks and filled her with dismay. There was a reason for this absurd and most unnatural desire to prevent her returning to the house, she felt sure; this devotion was too violent, too sudden. Finding that remonstrance was useless, she at last was obliged to exert her muscular strength, which was considerable; and after an exciting struggle she ended by freeing herself, and escaping by a path which brought her too quickly in view of the house for him to dare to follow.

Just within the conservatory door, by which she

entered, Rose found Siegfried, who was looking as if he, on his side, was suffering from some great excitement. At sight of her flushed face and the red marks on her wrists, he uttered a cry and started forward. She made a gesture to keep him back.

"I am not hurt," she said.

"Hurt!" echoed he, gazing into her face with eager solicitude. "Who has dared to try to hurt you?"

Rose laughed, and tried to put him off, seeing how deep his distress was. But he kissed her hands and hung about her, with a passionate fervor in the hesitating words he uttered which was new and alarming.

"You must tell me who it was. I will know. I have a right to know, for I love you and will protect you as you have protected me," he whispered hoarsely.

Rose tried to draw herself away, tried to look hard and dignified, but she failed utterly, for she loved him, and the very touch of his hands moved her to almost uncontrollable emotion.

"Prince—Siegfried, you must not speak like that, you must not dare to think such things. You don't wish to bring pain and trouble upon me, I'm sure."

"Oh, Rose, the trouble is come," said he close to her ear, with trembling lips. "They will want to take me away from you. Will not that pain you?"

Oh, Rose, it would break my heart! I have grown from a sickly boy to a man in your sight, through your care; what you have begun you must finish, Rose; I cannot live without you."

She could not at first answer; the tempest of feeling in her was too strong. But the touch of her hand, as she laid it on her boy's head as she had so often done before, told him that, whatever frowning looks she might assume, her heart went out to him with the old sympathy.

"My boy," she whispered, "I do love you dearly. I do thank God that it was in the warmth of my love you grew strong for the trials and dangers that are in store for you. I feel, as you do, that the time is drawing near when we must be parted. I have fulfilled my trust to your father, and I live in the firm hope that the love he felt for you and passed on to me has not been thrown away. By the grace of Heaven, I believe you will fight your enemies well, and win back your right place in the world."

"I don't want any place in the world without you, Rose," burst out Siegfried. "I don't want a kingdom, I want you for my wife. And nothing shall prevent my winning you, unless," and his face and voice changed, "unless you really love this Gerard Fowler——"

Rose interrupted him passionately.

"I will never speak to him again."

Siegfried instantly guessed the truth.

"It is he you have just seen!" he cried. "He has annoyed you, insulted you! And I was not there to protect you. Now, Rose, you can say nothing now; you must promise to be my wife without delay, do you hear? without delay, I say."

In his vehemence he wrung her hands fiercely; and Rose, suddenly suspicious, held him back.

"Why are you so earnest, so persistent?" she asked. "Something has happened that you have not told me of; I can see it in your eyes."

For answer he flung himself on his knees before her, sobbing and clinging to her.

"Yes, yes," he whispered brokenly. "I cannot keep it from you any longer. They have just told me there is some one in the drawing-room who wants to see me. It is Mr. Silchester."

Rose started violently. The blow had fallen at last in earnest. Although she had never expressed in words to Siegfried her black suspicions of this man, the prince had been able to guess that she considered him the most dangerous of his enemies. For a few moments each looked in the other's face with an expression of dull, undefined dread. Then Rose smiled bitterly.

"Of what use are your pretty plans now, my poor boy?" she asked in a husky whisper.

The words had scarcely passed her dry lips when a footstep she remembered well through all these months was heard inside the house. Hurriedly bidding Siegfried to rise, she composed herself by a great effort for the ordeal before her. The next moment Mr. Silchester, as handsome and beautiful as ever, was in the conservatory holding out two exquisitely white hands to her in most effusive greeting.

"My *dear* Mrs. Revel," he began, not at all put out by the coldness of her look and manner. "I began to think I should never have the pleasure of renewing a delightful acquaintance. And what—why, who in the world have we here? Not, surely, the pale, shivering lad whom I pitied with all my heart on that unfortunate last meeting of ours! Well, Mrs. Revel, allow me to congratulate you with all my heart on what I feel sure is the most successful piece of nursing your skill ever accomplished."

He shook hands heartily with Siegfried, who, less wary than Rose, was inclined to think she must have misjudged this amiable and courtly gentleman.

Mr. Silchester hastened to explain that he had come on a hurried visit to see how his young friend was getting on, moved thereto by the fact that he had on the previous day by chance met Donald Keith, whose manner had given him the impression that something was wrong with the little household.

"And I am forced to come to the conclusion," continued Mr. Silchester, "that our friend Donald was animated by pure and simple jealousy in making this report, for I can't imagine that either of you could possibly look better. Poor Donald feels that you, Madam Revel, have ousted him from his place in the heart of your charge here."

Mr. Silchester was on his way to Liverpool, he said, and had left his luggage at the station ; he would only ask their hospitality for a few hours, and then continue his journey by the one late train. So he dined with them, fascinated them in spite of themselves by his geniality and his interesting descriptions of his life in India, and then took his departure, leaving himself barely time to catch his train. Therefore, Rose was not surprised when he returned, an hour afterwards, in a cab with his luggage, craving their further indulgence could they put him up for the night.

Of course they could not refuse, but Rose's heart beat high with apprehension. There was only one spare room in the house ready for use ; it was that which Donald Keith had occupied during his stay, and had at one time communicated with the bedroom Siegfried used by means of a door which was now fastened up. This door was at the head of the prince's bed, but concealed by the draperies at the back.

Rose, who had seen among Mr. Silchester's luggage a package of the same size and shape of the suspicious hat box of his which she had seen at the Liverpool hotel before, came to a sudden decision which she kept to herself until the moment of retiring for the night. Even then she could not get a word with Siegfried alone; but as she shook hands with the prince in the hall, and let him light her candle, she managed to whisper:—

"Change rooms with me to-night. Go to yours, and a minute later I will come in without knocking, and you will slip in to my room without one word."

This whisper was passed in the very presence of Mr. Silchester, Rose seizing a moment when he was lighting Mrs. Thomson's candle and wishing that lady good-night.

The concerted stratagem was executed without a hitch—that is to say, without a sound. The prince slipped out of his room as she slipped in, so quietly that she felt satisfied that no noise had reached even the sharp ears in the next room.

For fear of rousing his suspicions she lay down on the bed, but a few minutes later slid off it again, and listened, affecting before long the heavy breathing of a person asleep. As nothing whatever happened, this proceeding soon made her drowsy, and her sleepy head was falling on the bed by which she was kneel-

ing, when the gentlest little scraping sound in the world suddenly roused her into wakefulness. She had placed an unlighted candle beside her with a box of matches. Listening now very intently, she heard the gentle scrape-scape behind the bed-drapery, never ceasing, low, monotonous, such a sound as would scarcely have roused the lightest sleeper. It went on for a very long time, for hours as it seemed to Rose. At last she heard a sound of something giving way: the door was opening. A moment later the drapery was moved; then, almost as soon, it was replaced.

Then came perfect silence. Rose had seen a faint gleam of light as the drapery was drawn aside; that was all. The door had been softly closed again. She waited. The minutes passed slowly in the silence, the darkness, and the suspense, Was nothing going to happen? *Had* nothing happened? A faint hissing sound suddenly struck on her ears, and a suspicion darted into her mind so loathsome, so terrible, that she suddenly became wet and cold from head to foot and unable to move; the next moment she heard the hissing sound again, nearer than before.

Springing back lightly to her feet, still retaining presence of mind enough to make no noise, she struck a light. Holding the candle over the bed with a shaking hand, she looked, and saw—nothing. After a moment's sickening hesitation, she tore back the bed-

clothes. A brown snake, coiled between the sheets, sprang up, darting its head towards her.

As the king had died, so was his young son to have died also—by the bite of a poisonous snake.

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING ENTERPRISE.

IN spite of herself, Rose could not quite repress all outward signs of emotion when the horrible truth became manifest to her. As the poisonous reptile darted towards her she sprang back with a low, hoarse, muffled cry; and whirling round giddily with such rapidity that the candle went out, she staggered to the door and fled down the passage.

Siegfried heard her and ran to meet her. He too had been sitting up, wondering what her object was in exchanging rooms with him, and anxious for her safety he scarcely knew why. As soon as she saw him in the corridor she signed to him to be silent, and, pushing him into a curtained recess, ran into her own room, and hastily took down her hair and put on her dressing-gown. Then she returned to the corridor, whispered a few hasty words, not of explanation, but of instruction into Siegfried's ear, and making him fall on a seat and cover his face with his hands, she affected to administer advice and consolation to him in tones which, although not loud, would be able to reach Mr. Silchester's ear.

The first person, however, to put in an appearance was Mrs. Thomson, who was persuaded to return to her rest on being informed by Rose that Siegfried had had a fright, from which he was now recovering. It was not until this lady, before returning to her room, had made such a commotion as nobody could sleep through, that Mr. Silchester, with a perfect assumption of extreme sleepiness, appeared at the door of his room, and inquired if anything was the matter.

"It's all right now, thank you," said Rose, turning to him without the least show of the abhorrence she felt. "The prince had a sort of nightmare, and fancied he saw something horrible in his bed, so that I can't persuade him to go back to his room. Perhaps you, who are cleverer than I, can."

"Some one has been playing him a trick, perhaps. Let us all go in together, and see."

Siegfried, following the instructions he had received, still appeared paralyzed with fright and unable to move. Rose, Mrs. Thomson and Mr. Silchester, therefore, went in together. They searched the bed and the entire room, of course finding nothing. On returning to the corridor they found that Siegfried had gone off to the library, where he persisted in remaining, saying that he had had such a shock that he could not sleep, and that he should read through the night. No questions of Mr. Silchester's could get

any more definite explanation of the cause of his fright than an admission that it might have been his imagination which had played a trick with him. Mrs. Thomson and Rose having both offered to sit up with him, Siegfried, after a moment's hesitation, accepted their offer, and the three remained together in the library, where the elder lady, having made up the dying fire, promptly fell off to sleep in a low arm-chair.

"That is what I was hoping for," said Siegfried ingenuously, as he watched Mrs. Thomson's head, after bobbing backwards and forwards, settle comfortably against the cushion. "It is selfish of me to keep you up; but, Rose, you have infected me with your own fear; I begin to feel that my happiness is over; we shall be separated."

Rose said nothing. She took his hand and pressed it within hers; but it was all the encouragement she could give.

"Rose, Rose, say something, just one word to comfort me," he whispered brokenly.

"My dear boy," said she, "you will have no comfort now but in doing your duty. It is of no use for me to tell you that you are not surrounded by dangers, or that the man upstairs is not an enemy."

"Did he frighten you, Rose, when you were in my room? Why did you make me pretend to be frightened?"

She hesitated ; but at last decided that, ghastly as the story was, the time had come for him to learn at least that part of it which concerned himself. In a low voice, therefore, she told him hurriedly of the hand thrust between the draperies and of the discovery she had subsequently made. Siegfried listened quietly, and at the end of her recital only sighed and said :

"I think, Rose, I am sorry you did not leave me in my room. Of what good will my life be to me if you will not marry me ?"

Rose remained silent for a few moments. Then she said :

"Do you think I wouldn't marry you if I could, Siegfried? Do you think it is dislike of you that makes me refuse? Do you ever look into my face without seeing affection for you in it ?"

"No, no, no. Tell me why you won't have me, then."

"Because if marriage with me would be a good thing for you, you would not be allowed to marry me ; while, if it would be a bad thing for you, I would not consent to it myself."

"How could it be a bad thing for me ?"

"It would be bad if you were to succeed to your father's kingdom, for it would then be a *mésalliance*."

"I don't want to succeed to it."

"But it will be your duty to do so if called upon."

Rulers may not shirk their responsibilities any more than other people."

"And supposing I were *not* called upon, would you marry me, then?"

"Yes."

"And don't you think that anything which lessened my chances of becoming king, as you say marriage with you would do, would increase my chances of being allowed to live?"

Rose hesitated. There was something in this view.

"I don't know. Perhaps it would," she admitted.

"Well, then, do the very best thing you can for my safety, and let me get a license for our wedding immediately."

He pressed her so hard, and there was so evidently some sense in his arguments, that at last Rose, without giving him a decided answer in the affirmative, had given him enough encouragement to justify him in assuring her that he should get the license on the following day. And so the night wore away into the morning, and the grey dawn found Mrs. Thomson still asleep, Siegfried radiant with new hope, but Rose heavy-hearted, and full of the gloomiest forebodings.

Mr. Silchester came down to breakfast in good spirits, but most anxious to leave early. It was no

use for him to go on to Liverpool now, he said ; he must just make the best of his way back to London. Would Madam Revel be good enough to see him off to the station ? He had something important to consult her about, something relating to her charge. Rose felt bound to go.

In the fly, on the way to the station, Mr. Silchester made a great many inquiries concerning the young man's state of mind in reference to his political prospects. Rose said that his mind seemed to be a blank on the subject ; his great wish seemed to be to lead a peaceful and retired life.

"Such as he has been leading here with you ?" said Mr. Silchester, fixing on her a gaze of piercing, curious inquiry, which made her blush and drop her eyes.

They had now reached the station, a junction just outside Scarborough, where the express stopped to pick up passengers for Malton and York. The train was just coming in. Mr. Silchester took his place in an empty first-class compartment, and left the door open while he talked to Rose, who was on the platform close to the carriage.

"They won't be starting for five minutes yet," he said, looking at his watch. "Take a seat for a moment ; I want to have one point settled."

Rose hesitated a moment ; but, as there was plenty

of time, and she was anxious to hear whatever he had to say about Siegfried, she stepped inside, not contemplating the possibility of his boldly daring to run away with her. That, however, was his intention. No sooner was he seated than he at once broke into a subject so interesting that all her thoughts were at once absorbed by it.

"I know," he began, "that Siegfried is in love with you; more than that, he wants to marry you."

Rose absolutely trembled; for there was something in the steely brightness of this man's eyes, as he bent forward and fixed them full upon hers, absolutely mesmeric, and impossible to escape from. She scarcely noticed the closing of the carriage door, but sat there spell-bound, admitting with stammering tongue that she knew of Siegfried's love, but adding that she had told him that the difference between his rank and hers was too great for happy marriage.

While she was speaking, she suddenly became conscious that the train was in motion. She started up and put her hand upon the door. The window was up, and Mr. Silchester quietly prevented her lowering it.

"Too late," he said very calmly as he pointed out to her the fact that they had passed the platform. "You will have to go as far as Malton; the train does not stop till then."

"Let me get to the communicator, then, she said sharply, still trying to open the window.

"I can't let you do that; it would be too frivolous," said her companion, smiling. "It's not much more than a twenty minutes' run."

Rose turned upon him quickly.

"You did this on purpose," she said, scarcely above her breath.

"Well, and what if I did?" said he, with the same persistent smile. "Can you blame me if I got by stratagem a few minutes more of that delightful society you dole out so sparingly to me?"

She drew a long breath of amazement at his audacity:

"The fact is," he went on suavely, "that you and your interesting charge had to be separated by force, as I saw it would be impossible to accomplish it by persuasion."

Rose's face became in a moment convulsed with agony. She understood. She was too faithful a protector, so she had to be got out of the way.

"Siegfried!" she gasped out. "What are you going to do with him?"

"Nothing but what is for his good, I assure you, madam."

But Rose, now feeling that hope was past, poured out her passionate indignation without check.

"His good! His good!" she cried scornfully, bitterly. "Was it for his good you tried to murder him last night, as you murdered his father? Was it for his good you trusted him to me when you thought I hated him, and you take him away now that you know I love him and watch over him? What are these evil orders that you are carrying out against the most harmless creature that ever lived? Who has sent you? Who are you?"

Mr. Silchester remained unmoved alike by her accusations and her emotion.

"Who am I?" he repeated gently. "I am Charles Silchester, a hard-working solicitor. If you want to know anything more about me I am afraid I must be discourteous enough to remind you that you first introduced yourself to me under pretences the falsity of which I only discovered yesterday morning. In revenge, I retain the right to let you know no more about myself than I choose to tell, madam."

"I shall find out the rest for myself," said Rose firmly. "And whoever your masters may be, I shall not rest until I have brought you to justice."

"There is nothing I should like better," said Mr. Silchester politely. "I will not insult you, madam, by saying I have a great regard for you, because I never have any regard for those who interfere with my plans; but I will do you the justice to say that

you have interfered with mine a good deal, and that you are quite the most dangerous woman I have ever met, and therefore the one most worthy of respect."

Rose was silent. She knew that argument and entreaty were alike thrown away on this man, and devoted herself rather to devising a plan of action for herself in case, as she expected, she should find on her return home that some harm had happened to Siegfried. Only one question more she put to Mr. Silchester before the train reached Malton.

"Why," she asked, "do you object to the idea the prince has conceived of marrying me, since it would tend to make him ineligible as a candidate for the throne of Sergania?"

"Perhaps no candidates, ineligible or otherwise, are wanted," answered he briefly.

She said no more until the train drew into Malton station, where she jumped out, saying simply: "Good-morning." The last she saw of her unwelcome companion was a glimpse of a bowing figure on the platform at the door of the carriage, apologizing for the fact that his train was going on immediately, so that he could not see her started on her return journey.

Rose had to wait nearly two hours for a train to take her back. She paced the platform like a newly caged wild animal, tortured by fears for her boy. This carefully-contrived absence of hers, short as it would

be, was enough, she felt sure, for the execution of some diabolical scheme against the prince. As the time went on, during which she had to remain helpless, her fears and excitement rose gradually to such a height that imagination began to play tricks with her, and she fancied she heard his voice calling to her for help.

The strongest, bravest woman is superstitious when her deepest affections are concerned. For some few moments Rose felt dizzy, and her heart seemed to stand still; although she was ready to acknowledge that the sounds in her ears were the work of her fancy only, she believed, in spite of reason, that they betokened some present harm happening to Siegfried, the knowledge of which was thus borne to her through the sympathy which existed between them. Some instinct caused her to hesitate before taking her place in the train she had been waiting for, when at last it steamed into the station ten minutes after its time. As, however, she sought in vain for some reason to support this vague feeling, she ended by taking her place in an empty compartment just as the train started.

Unable, however, tormented as she was, to retain her seat, she began to pace up and down the small space at her command, and reached the other end of the compartment just as another train from Scarbo-

rough began to slacken as it entered Malton station. It was something more than instinct now which made her scan the occupants of the train, as one by one the carriages were whirled past her straining eyes. The slackening train was bound for York, like that which was carrying Silchester. Who knew but——

Her conjectures ceased, cut short by horrible, inevitable fact. The train in which she stood was now going fast, but not too fast for her startled eyes to see her boy, her Siegfried, lying back in a compartment of the York train, his eyes closed and an expression of intense suffering on his face; while on the opposite seat, bending forward officiously towards him, Rose caught sight of the cringing figure and cat-like face of Donald Keith.

With a shriek Rose thrust out her hands towards him; but the train she was in had shot past. She flew like a maniac to the opposite window; the communicator was not attached. Panting, clenching her hands, beating her breast, she could do nothing until the train, which was a stopping one, reached the next station. There she got out. But what precious time had she not been compelled to lose? She must wait for another train to take her back; already she knew that it would be impossible for her to overtake her darling on this side of London.

And in the meantime—? Rose moaned aloud as

fearful suggestions crowded into her mind. She had seen, with the awful clearness of loving eyes, that Siegfried's features were convulsed with agony. Was that suffering mental only, and to be accounted for by his supposed loss of her and the explanation Donald would put on it? Or was it actual physical pain of which she had seen the traces on her poor boy's face? They had tried the poison of venomous snakes; they would not be backward in trying another, since that had failed. All poor Rose Revel's experience and strength of mind availed little now for her; it was an old-young woman, with drawn face and tottering gait, who got out of the train at York and listened in dumb pain to the porter who told her that the train for London had just gone; there would not be another for two hours and a half.

When at last she reached town, she went straight to Mr. Combermere's office, and, as he had left business for the day, she learned his private address, and followed him home. He listened attentively to the story of the heartbroken woman. The dangers which surrounded Siegfried were real no doubt, he admitted; and the consolation he had to offer was of the poorest. These two men, calling themselves Keith and Silchester, were unquestionably Russian agents accredited by the Government of the Tsar.

"I could understand their persecution of him if he

had been constantly visited by discontented or loyal Serganians," said Rose. "But why interfere with a harmless young man whose only object is to be left in perfect peace?"

"You see, they think at any time he may take up an active position. In the meantime, the hopes of all subjects of his late father who were loyal turn to him just as surely as if he were the most prominent of fussy agitators."

"Then you think there is no doubt the Tsar is at the bottom of all this?"

"The Tsar or his ministers. In an autocratic government one is not always sure who is the real autocrat."

Rose sprang up with a determined face.

"I have made up my mind what to do then. I will go and see the Tsar. Perhaps I shall be too late—" And her voice trembled. "But if not—and my affection for that poor lad is so strong that I feel almost as if the very force of it could keep him alive—I will plead for him with such words, such fire, that even this great despotic emperor shall listen to me."

Mr. Combermere stroked his chin and listened to her with some amusement, but with even more dismay.

"You don't surely seriously entertain the notion of such a wild-goose chase," he said at last rather coldly. "I don't wish to pretend that all Russians are the

bogeys we have been taught to believe them. But the liberty of the subject is not a phrase very well understood over there; and remember, your person and the object of your journey would be known, so that it is in the last degree unlikely that you would be allowed to come within a hundred miles of the person of the Tsar himself."

"I have some powerful friends," said Rose, "I think I shall be safe. I mean to make the attempt, at all events."

Mr. Combermere made a little grimace.

"Very well. I never argue with ladies. I will set a detective to work in the meanwhile, and do my best to get the young man back into more trustworthy society than that of Mr. Donald Keith and his accomplices."

Rose left the solicitor with a heavy heart, but with her mind firmly made up. The next day she set about the necessary preparations for her arduous undertaking. She procured, through the friends whom she had not unjustly called powerful, such introductions as would make her contemplated journey at least safe for herself. Then, without any further delay, she started, having saved from her salary enough money to carry out her plans.

It was in the first days of April that she found herself, after a bitterly cold but uneventful journey,

in the capital of the Tsars. Although the worst severity of the winter was over, and the snow, which she had been taught to expect, was no longer upon the ground, the northern air was keen enough to have caused her great inconvenience, if the anxiety at her heart had not been so deep as to make her almost insensible to atmospheric conditions. Her first visit was to the English ambassador, who was courteous, but scarcely encouraging, and who informed her that her movements were being jealously watched, that the object of her visit to Russia was possibly known and certainly suspected, and that it was only through the influence of the powerful friends she was known to have that the police had kept their hands off her so far. He advised her to return to England without delay, assuring her that her errand was hopeless.

"Believe me," he said, "even if you were to see the Tsar you would be no nearer attaining your object than you are now. A despotic government is a wheel that turns continually, crushing everything that comes in its way, and that cannot be stopped by any individual, even by the despot himself. I beg you therefore, madam, to take this warning, and spare your country the complications which might arise if you, an English subject, were to get into trouble with the police over here, a contingency which I shall never cease to dread as long as you remain here."

His coldness, his discouragement, had no effect on Rose, who listened with downcast eyes and then simply repeated her request that he would try to procure her the desired interview. She was so persistent, so discreet, she used her influence so cautiously, but so effectively, that within a week the longed-for permission was really accorded to her; an officer arrived at her hotel one morning with the news that he was empowered to conduct her to the royal residence.

Rose Revel's heart seemed to stand still. Now that the moment so passionately desired was really approaching, she began for the first time to doubt her own powers. If her tongue should falter, if the majestic presence should overawe her faculties too much, all her work would be in vain, and her boy more surely lost than if she had never moved in his behalf. She put on her bonnet with its flowing veil and the long nurse's mantle, which gave her tall figure so much distinction, with shaking hands; and took her place with her conductor in a closed carriage, which on the instant drove rapidly away.

Then, for the first time, a doubt as to her destination flashed into her mind. All the horrors which she had read of or been told about the terrible police system of the White Tsar came back vividly to her recollection. This permission to appear before the

emperor, so suddenly and unexpectedly granted, might it not be a ruse under cover of which she was even now being taken to some prison from which all the efforts her friends might make would be powerless to release her? The early and sudden Northern twilight had fallen; looking out of the carriage Rose could see only that the houses were becoming fewer, and that gaunt trees began to appear in the distance. They must be on the outskirts of the town. Her companion was suspiciously silent; for although neither understood the language of the other, both spoke French, in which tongue it would have been easy for him to carry on a conversation, as Rose, to wile away the dreary time of suspense, would have been glad to do.

At last the houses seemed to come to an end altogether, and Rose's fears grew stronger when she found, on stopping to change horses at a small hostelry which was little better than a roadside inn, that they had long been clear of the town. On they went again after a short pause for the refreshment which Rose could not touch, past thickets of bare trees along a lonely road.

It seemed to Rose that they must have traveled far into the night when at last the horses, which had been traveling at a great pace, were pulled up sharply at the massive gates of an immense park, and a sol-

dier challenged the occupants of the carriage. The officer who accompanied Rose having satisfied the challenger with what sounded to the English woman like one brief, guttural word, the gates were thrown open, and the carriage dashed on along a winding road, along which Rose, looking in curiosity from the window, saw soldiers at intervals the whole way.

The drive through the park seemed never-ending. At last, however, the horses drew up under a vast building, of the exterior of which Rose in vain tried to see something. More soldiers, always soldiers. She was hurried out of the carriage, up the steps and into the building through great doors which seemed to close behind her with a snap. And yet this was not a prison, although the vigilant guard, the precautions, and the sort of mistrustful watchfulness which seemed to peep out of the eyes of the servants in stately liveries who passed and re-passed with soft steps through the great hall, seemed to Rose more suggestive of a fortress than a palace. Yet this was the palace of the White Tsar.

Weighted as she was with the awful responsibility she had taken upon herself, Rose could not help remarking the splendor of the long corridors through which she was led, their painted walls and ceilings, the silken draperies at the various doors, through which she obtained glimpses of sumptuous, brilliantly-

lighted compartments, such as even her imagination had never pictured before. The brilliant novelty of the scene increased the excitement from which she was suffering to such an extent that throbbing in her head and a rushing sound in her ears made her fear that she might lose consciousness.

At last the dignified usher, who had led them with slow steps through a labyrinth of stately corridors, turned and stopped before one of the silk-hung doors. Opening this, he led them into a handsome room, the walls of which glistened like polished marble. The draperies were of grey and silver brocade, on which hundreds of candles, ranged in pyramidal form in sconces on the walls, threw a soft light. There was no one in the room on their entrance; but after a few seconds of breathless waiting, Rose saw her companion, the silent officer, turn with a bow in the direction of two massive curtains, which evidently concealed the entrance to another compartment. At the same moment, a faint rustle of silk told her that one of the curtains had been moved. She turned slowly, and made a low curtsy, at first not daring to raise her eyes.

"Here is madam," said the officer in French, in a low, respectful voice.

And he instantly retreated.

"His Excellency the Deputy-Chief of Police,"

announced the voice of an attendant the next moment.

Not the Tsar then! Rose felt that she breathed more freely at this respite from the ordeal of the Royal Presence. She took courage and looked up.

A smiling gentleman in evening dress, with orders and decorations sparkling on his breast, was holding out his hand to her.

His Excellency the Deputy-Chief was—Mr. Silchester.

CHAPTER XII.

SIEGFRIED'S CROWN.

THE shock of this meeting, after the first moment, braced Rose up for a contest. She would not touch Mr. Silchester's proffered hand, but drew herself to her full height, and returned the gaze of his glittering eyes with a steady look of proud, despairing defiance.

"You will not meet me as a friend?" said he in his soft voice. "Why not? It would be wiser. Although I am only a poor wanderer when in England I have a position in this country. Believe me, you are mistaken in thinking I bear you any ill-will. I cherished a momentary resentment against you at one time for thwarting my plans; but as since then I have succeeded completely, I have forgiven you. For is not your visit here a convincing proof of my success? In fact, if it had not been so, I, having knowledge of your movements, should have taken steps to prevent your coming."

"You have killed him, then? Killed Siegfried?" asked Rose in a low, monotonous voice.

"Your Siegfried, the pure if somewhat insipid boy?"

Yes, he is dead. But calm yourself, madam. There lives in Paris, and very happily I am told, a young Prince Siegfried who has discovered that there is something better worth living for than even the devotion of his nurse. In a word, you restored his health to good purpose; he is now able to enjoy life—under the auspices of his friend Donald, who seems to have found a better road to his heart than through theosophic mysticism."

"I see; you have not stopped short at the destruction of his body this time; you must have mind, soul, all. It is devil's work."

"Madam, the exigencies of State demand diabolical assistance sometimes to defeat the endeavors of angels—like yourself."

Her great black eyes flashed fire at his mocking tone.

"But I will not believe it!" she burst out. "He could not be corrupted so soon!"

"A very beautiful faith, madam, born, I am afraid, of inexperience of the nature of young men. I myself am no more to be satisfied without proofs than you are. Let me show you three little notes which I received from Donald Keith this morning. He says that Siegfried has fallen desperately in love with a well-known Parisian burlesque actress, and that every evening, when he is dressing for dinner, one of these little notes is brought to him by a waiter."

Rose took the three notes which Mr. Silchester handed to her ; but at first she hardly dared to open them, for they were folded in a manner peculiar to Siegfried, and the very scrawl, "Donald Keith, Esq.," on the outside of each was unmistakably his ; whatever the contents of the notes might be, they were certainly not forgeries. Her hesitation lasted only a few seconds ; she would betray no weakness before this man. Opening the notes, one after the other, she read them steadily through. They were very short, and all of the same character.

"Don't wait dinner for me, but send me some money by bearer, I am off to see the lady. Shall not be back before you are in bed."

"Am going out. Shall not be back before three or four in the morning."

"Please send me more money. Don't wait up for me."

Rose gave them back with a steady hand.

"Yes," she said quietly, "to judge by these you seem to have succeeded."

"You do not doubt their authenticity ?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot."

"Ah ! madam, believe me I am sorry for you."

"Thank you."

"I know it is impossible to make you understand my position ; that in my duty to the State I have to

be deaf to all those gentler feelings which knock just as surely at my heart as at that of any other man."

Rose smiled incredulously.

At that moment an official entered the room between the heavy curtains, and informed Rose that an audience would be granted her if she would follow him. She did so with a heavy heart, her previous fear of the royal presence much abated. She could indeed still plead for Siegfried, but not as she would have pleaded half an hour ago. As Mr. Silchester had said, *her* Siegfried was dead; it was for a stranger that she would intercede.

Through two or three gorgeous apartments she was led, until at last the steps of her conductor slackened before a room which seemed to be the last of the suite, the entrance to which was between undraped pillars of red marble. Here on the outer side two liveried officials were standing, who gave Rose the idea of being either soldiers or policemen in disguise. Her conductor did not himself venture between the pillars; but with a low bow to someone within he signed to Rose to do so.

With her heart beating very fast she obeyed.

There were two gentlemen in the room, the younger of whom Rose at once knew to be the great autocrat himself. He wore a brilliant military uniform, and looked tired and harassed. He examined the new-

comer from head to foot with ever-alert suspicion, as she stood bowing low, waiting until it should be his pleasure to address her.

"Well," said he at last, in French, in a sharp, weary and fretful voice. "You have a request to make to me, they say; and you have come all the way from England to make it."

"Yes, may it please Your Majesty."

"It concerns the young Pretender to the throne of Sergania, in whom they say you take an interest. Is not that so?"

And the Emperor, with the same anxious air, glanced at the gentleman who was with him.

"May it please Your Majesty, he has lived six months in England without holding any communication with Sergania."

"He has been intriguing to marry the Princess of Marienburg. The object of such a match must have been a political one."

"May it please Your Majesty, it was his father's project, and exceedingly distasteful to himself. It was my influence only which induced him unwillingly to fall in with it."

"Your influence?" The Emperor frowned.

"Yes, Your Majesty. I was bound by a promise to his father."

"Ah! His father! A born sedition-monger! And so you were the father's accomplice?"

"I nursed him on his death-bed, that was all."

"And the son? I don't quite understand your relation with the son."

"He was in weak health. I watched over him and guarded him back to strength until—until, Your Majesty, he learned to depend on me, and to wish to make me his wife."

"Ah!"

This announcement seemed to find some favor with the Tsar. He looked at Rose attentively, and spoke less shortly.

"But you objected?"

"If he had been in my own rank I should not have done so, for I had learned to love him. But I feared that marriage with me would not raise me, but lower him."

"Ah! Yes, yes."

"But he assured me that he was not fitted for a political career; his tastes were all for quiet country life. And I had half consented to marry him when—when, Your Majesty, we were forcibly separated, just at the moment when we hoped that he had been forgotten."

"Ah, that was Nikolai's doing. Nikolai does not forget," said the Tsar with an approving smile.

Nikolai, Rose concluded, must be Mr. Silchester. Surely the Tsar, who seemed, in spite of his reputation, mild and humane, could not know what means his

lieutenant was in the habit of using to secure his ends! Rose resolved, at all risks, to enlighten him. She was ready to face any dangers the vengeance of "Mr. Silchester" might bring down upon himself; as for Siegfried, his enemies would probably be satisfied that they had accomplished his ruin. A young man absorbed in the pleasures of Paris was politically non-existent.

"It is impossible to doubt his devotion to Your Majesty," she began, diffidently. "But I am sure that Your Majesty has been kept in ignorance of some of the means used by him."

The Tsar seemed discouragingly indifferent.

"Of course," he said, "it is not possible that I should hear every detail of the way in which my commands are executed. It is enough for me that the result is what I wished."

"But what if the means used include murder, Your Majesty, not only attempted but in one instance actually accomplished?"

Rose uttered these words with solemn deliberation, counting upon the sensational effect they were bound to produce. They fell almost unheeded, however, except that the Tsar showed signs of beginning to find this interview tedious. He had remained standing throughout, but he now began to move a step or two forward, and drummed with his fingers impa-

tiently upon a table which stood near him. The gentleman in attendance gave Rose a significant look, which, however, only nerved her to make a fresh and stronger effort, as she saw that her time was running short.

"I was present when the late King of Sergania died. If I were to tell you how he died it would fill you with horror."

Her great eyes burned with excitement, her red lips quivered as she uttered these words. The Tsar, although he still showed little interest in the narrative, felt more in the narrator. His rather impatient and indifferent manner gave place to one of attention as he watched the traces of deep emotion in her handsome face.

"My dear madam," he said in a gentler tone than he had used and with a courteous smile, "I cannot feel as you do about this matter. In affairs of State, if a statesman were to allow the ordinary emotions of humanity to sway him, he would lose his power of directing events. I think you must see that for yourself. Is a general a fiend because he orders the cannon to be turned upon the enemy without shedding tears? Believe me, a statesman working for the good of his country cannot commit crime. But just as the general may feel sorrow, when the battle is won, for the widows and orphans he has

helped to make, so I, madam, sympathize with your tender, womanly feelings, and will do what I can to heal a wound I would not willingly have made. You wish to be able to marry this young Siegfried?"

"No, Your Majesty," answered Rose sadly, "I cannot say that I wish for that now. Other influences have been at work with him, and I no longer wish for what he would no longer wish himself."

"Then what is your object in appealing to me?"

"I would ask that, since he has none of the aspirations of a Pretender, this persecution of him as a Pretender may cease."

"I should be more inclined to grant your prayer if it were still your wish to marry him. A happy man—and I am sure you would make a husband happy, madam—is less likely to conspire than a miserable one."

Rose shook her head.

"Then, if I granted your prayer, you would go back to England and never trouble your head about him again?"

Rose hesitated but her face changed.

"I cannot say that, Your Majesty. I should like to be the bearer of your gracious message to him, and to give him a last warning for his father's sake—and for my own," she murmured in a grave, soft voice.

The Tsar smiled and began to look much more good-humored.

"Ah," said he, "a very praiseworthy intention, which I will do my best to help you to carry out. The last advices from Sergania tell me that all is quiet there, the people having accepted with acclamation the new ruler I have appointed. Is it not so, general?" he continued, turning to the gentleman in attendance.

"It is, Your Majesty."

The Tsar turned again to Rose.

"Therefore, we will summon Nikolai, who will no doubt be able to tell you where this young man may be found, to whom you shall bear the tidings of our clemency."

The Tsar touched a little silver bell, and an attendant appeared almost immediately, who, with a delay of only a few moments, ushered "Mr. Silchester" into the imperial presence.

"We have summoned you here, Nikolai, to tell you that we are satisfied of the submission of the youth Siegfried von Dortmund-Albisheim to our will, and that, therefore, the wrongs done to our imperial rights by his late father are overlooked, and this lady is to be the bearer of our message of clemency to him."

The Deputy-Chief of Police bowed submissively.

"At the same time," continued the Tsar, "we wish to thank you for the zeal with which you have conducted this difficult case."

Rose kept her eyes down ; she did not wish the astonishment and disgust she felt at the last words to appear in her face to mar the effect of her gratitude for the first.

" You will," continued His Imperial Majesty, " give this lady the address of the youth Siegfried, if you are acquainted with it, and see her safely started on her journey."

He held out his hand, which Rose respectfully touched with her lips ; and then, understanding that she was dismissed, and mindful of the traditions she had heard concerning interviews with royalty, she retreated backwards through the silken curtains into the outer apartment. Here " Mr. Silchester " met and conducted her to the outer door of the palace, informing her as they went that she would find Siegfried and " Donald Keith," as he took care to add with a smile of malice, at the Hôtel du Louvre, Paris.

" I should be sorry, madam," he said with his usual genial courteous manner as the wide doors were thrown open, and the officer who had conducted her to the palace reappeared, ready to escort her back to St. Petersburg, " to think that a lady whom I respect so profoundly as I do Madam Revel should bear me any ill-will in her thoughts. I trust you have exonerated me from any blame in this unhappy business, and that you give me the credit due to me for

having done my best to facilitate your journey here."

"I give you all the credit due to an elaborate machine, wound up to perform certain work, which it does perfectly, without scruples and without remorse, as a machine should. To think differently of you I should have to believe you a fiend."

"Believe me a fiend, then, with one touch of humanity. I am sorry for the sorrow I have had to bring upon a brave woman."

Rose, surprised out of herself, uttered a low sob. For the first time, she had seen in Mr. Silchester's cold eyes, and heard in his voice, signs of a genuine emotion.

She did not refuse her hand, as he took it in his and put it respectfully to his lips. The hope which she had lost that day had left her lonely, almost broken-spirited; she was glad of a word of kindness even from the man who had caused her this great sorrow. The next moment she withdrew her hand sharply, walked with rapid steps down the wide marble steps and got into the carriage, the officer who had brought her taking his place, as before, respectfully at her side.

At that moment Rose began a journey which she never forgot to the end of her life. For on reaching the city, after a rapid but weary journey in the darkness, she was driven straight to the station, where

her taciturn companion put her into a compartment of a starting train and got in himself after her, with the assurance that she would receive her luggage safely soon after her arrival in Paris. She was as anxious to get to her journey's end as her conductor could be; but the journey, as he directed it, without pause or rest of any kind, was more fatiguing than nights of sick-nursing. Sixty-six long hours of railway travel passed like a nightmare, broken only by the acuter misery of turning out at Eydtknknau, where the frontier was reached, to be searched by custom-house officers. As her conductor did not leave her here, Rose understood that his mission would not end until she had met Siegfried, so that he might carry back to his imperial master full particulars of that meeting and its result. As, however, he was the most unobtrusive of companions, and looked after her comfort with attentive courtesy, Rose was glad rather than otherwise of his society.

On the afternoon of the third day they reached Paris. By that time Rose was so worn out that she found the need of a few hours rest imperative, before she attempted to find the young prince. Driving straight, therefore, to a modest hotel she knew of, she engaged a room and threw herself on the bed for a little repose. Having neglected, however, to tell

one of the servants to wake her, fatigue got the better of her intentions, and she slept till past eight o'clock. When she awoke she put on her bonnet again hurriedly, and ran downstairs.

At the door of the hotel she met the companion of the journey, looking as fresh as if his natural rest had never been disturbed.

"I thought, madam," said he with a polite bow, "that you might have need of my escort again, and so I was prepared."

Rose, not put out by this espionage, which she took now as a matter of course, got into a *fiacre* with him and drove to the Hôtel du Louvre.

As she had expected, neither Siegfried nor Donald was known there under his real name. But enquiries elicited the fact that a young Englishman was staying there with his tutor. They were both out at present; the younger gentleman went out every evening and did not return until late, very late; so the waiter informed Rose with a certain eloquent discretion.

"I am his sister," said Rose. "I will wait for him."

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. Madam would have to wait many hours, he feared. However, on learning that the two gentlemen had a private sitting-room, madam desired to be shown up to it. Her companion wished her good-night and retired.

Rose entered the sitting-room with a heavy heart. Trifles which she recognized as belonging to him lay all about the apartment; a book she had read with him, a favorite paper knife of his given him by her, made her heart leap with the suggestion that he thought of her still. But a further examination of the room resulted in less satisfactory discoveries: a quantity of typical light literature of the boulevards, a large collection of photographs of half-clad Parisiennes—of one of whom Rose's jealous eyes found no less than fifteen representations—turned her sick with mortification and disgust. Indeed, she half resolved to retire, and to put off until the next morning an interview that must be nothing but pain both to her and to Siegfried.

For she knew he would be miserable, humble, affectionate, penitent; knew too that it would be a severe ordeal for her to tell him, as she must, that their loving friendship could not be renewed, that a barrier had been raised up between them which no penitence on his part could ever throw down. In a way she loved him still; but her respect, her trust, were dead. She could never be the wife, even if she could still be the friend, of a man who was corrupted and faithless so soon. She would warn him of the danger to his delicate constitution of the life he had evidently begun to lead; she would give him the message of the Tsar, and—leave him.

As her half-drowsy, half-excited thoughts reached this point, Rose fell asleep.

She awoke to find herself shivering with cold, the fire burnt out, the candles reduced to flickering ends an inch long. At first she did not remember where she was, as, stiff and benumbed, she rose out of the armchair in which she had been uncomfortably lying. Then the sound of a well-known footstep forced a cry from her lips, and she fell back, trembling from head to foot, against the mantel-piece for support.

The door opened, and Siegfried entered wearily, candle in hand. As the unexpected light in the room dazzled him, Rose had an opportunity of scanning his features. The very first glance bewildered, intoxicated her. For there was no change from the open candid face she had known except just this one: that it was weary and worn. The next moment she told herself that it was too soon to expect his altered way of life to have its effect upon his features.

As he advanced into the room, something seemed to strike him and check his steps. It was not the sight of Rose, for he had not yet turned his head in her direction. It was rather an instinct, the mere result, perhaps, of the unexpected light, a consciousness of something momentous about to happen. He stared in front of him, his blue eyes dilated, his whole face quivering with vague wonder. Then Rose made

some slight movement, and he turned slowly towards her.

With a cry, low yet piercing, straight from his heart, Siegfried let fall candlestick, overcoat, letters, and sprang across the room into her arms. Yes, her arms; for as he turned towards her Rose knew two things: that she had been deceived, for he was true to her; and that she could not live without him. She clasped his fair head to her breast, and looked straight into his loving eyes.

"What does all this mean?" she asked smiling. "these night-rambles, and these, and these?"

She pointed to the paper-backed novels and the photographs. Siegfried followed her glance indifferently.

"All that rubbish is Donald Keith's," he said. "I am sorry to have had to find out, Rose, that Donald is a fraud. His theosophical studies lose their hold on him as soon as he comes within sight of a pretty face. The only way in which I can get rid of him is by pretending that my tastes lie in the same direction as his. I tell him I am gone out for the night, ask him for some money, and then walk up and down the streets, knowing I shall find you, and wondering when it will be. The money he thinks I spend I save up. See here."

He opened his pocket-book, and showed Rose some hundreds of francs in gold and notes.

"When you went off to the station with Silchester that morning," he went on, in answer to her inquiries, "Donald Keith came to the house an hour later, saying that, now I was left to myself, he knew I should want my old friend. I asked him what he meant. He said that, not being able to rest until he had made his peace with you, he had come up from town that morning, and had been surprised to meet you and Mr. Silchester in the train, just starting for London. You were in great distress, and you told him that, feeling you had no right to marry me, you were off to some friends in Paris without a word to me, so that I might think you did not love me. Of course I instantly rushed off to the station, Donald with me; learned that you really had gone off in the London train, and started to follow, more mad than sane. It was not until I got to Paris, always accompanied by Donald, that I began to feel that I was the victim of some trick. It was of no use returning, for I had telegraphed to Mrs. Thomson and learnt that you had not returned. I could only wait for the moment when you should find me, or I you, never to be parted again."

"But listen, Siegfried. I have seen the Tsar himself, and he says that if you marry me you will lose all pretensions to the crown of Sergania."

"As I never had any pretensions to it, I can't be said to lose much."

"And Mr. Silchester, Siegfried, is the Deputy-Chief of the Russian Police!"

"Then my friend Donald is——"

Siegfried stopped, for he heard the cat-like tread of the gentleman in question outside. The door opened, and Donald Keith's smug face peeped in. No sooner did he catch sight of the lovers sitting side by side, their hands clasped, the fair head and the dark one close together, than he retreated with a promptitude worthy of his master, the Deputy-Chief of Police. Siegfried sprang up, followed by Rose, and they ran downstairs after the ex-tutor. At the entrance to the hotel, however, they found only Rose Revel's courteous traveling companion, in conference with the night porter.

The former raised his hat to Rose and to the prince.

"A gentleman has just passed out," he said smiling, "with whom I exchanged a few words. He will not trouble you again."

"May I ask for your escort as far as my hotel?" asked Rose, blushing.

"I shall be delighted, madam; more especially as it is the last small service I shall be able to render you, as my orders were that I should return to St. Petersburg as soon as I saw you and the prince re-united."

"Prince!" exclaimed Rose, shaking her head.

"He has nothing to do with titles or honors now, poor fellow! The Tsar said that if he would be safe, he must give up all hopes of a throne."

"Perhaps, madam, the prince will not complain that His Imperial Majesty has been too harsh to him."

"No," said Siegfried, as he held Rose's hand, and looked affectionately into her face. "His Majesty, you see, did not ask me to give up one crown until he was satisfied I had another I could wear more happily."

And the look the two exchanged, as they parted for the night, assured the courteous spy that the prince would be satisfied with the crown of a faithful woman's love.

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